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# STUDIES IN TEXTS:

FOR

FAMILY, CHURCH, AND SCHOOL.

BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

*Minister of the City Temple, London.*

*IN SIX VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

**FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY,**

NEW YORK AND LONDON,

"That a man stand and speak of spiritual things to men. It is beautiful;—even in its great obscuration and decadence, it is among the beautifulst, most touching objects one sees on the earth. This speaking man has indeed, in these times, wandered terribly from the point; has, alas, as it were totally lost sight of the point; yet, at bottom, whom have we to compare with him? Of all Public Functionaries boarded and lodged on the Industry of Modern Europe, is there one worthier of the board he has? A man ever professing, and never so languidly making still some endeavour to save the souls of men: contrast him with a man professing to do little but shoot the partridges of men! I wish he could find the point again, this Speaking one; and stick to it with tenacity, with deadly energy; for there is need of him yet! The Speaking Function—this of Truth coming to us with a living voice, nay, in a living shape, and as a concrete practical exemplar: this, with all our Writing and Printing Functions has a perennial place. Could he but find the point again,—take the old spectacles off his nose, and looking up discover, almost in contact with him what the *real* Satanas, and soul-devouring world-devouring Devil Now is."—CARLYLE.

## RETROSPECTIVE.

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**I**N June, 1848, I delivered my first sermon, if sermon it could be called. This preface is dated 1898. It takes but little reckoning, therefore, to discover that by the good hand of God upon me I have reached my pulpit Jubilee.

**TO FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST  
I GRATEFULLY AND RAPTUROUSLY AScribe  
WHATEVER GOOD MAY HAVE BEEN  
DONE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF MY MINISTRY.**

---

I well remember that sunny afternoon in June, and the village green and the sawpit on which I stood, and the eager-looking villagers. Surely it was but yesterday : it must be the calendar that is wrong ! In spirit I am now in the green field where my public ministry began. The afternoon was calm,—not a leaf did more than nod to the summer breeze ; the cattle chewed the cud in the adjacent fields with quite Sabbath serenity. Hence the

almost paralysis with which I recall the incredible fact that I broke like a sudden thunderstorm on that rural calm with the text:

“It shall be more tolerable for Tyre  
and Sidon at the judgment, than for  
you” (LUKE x. 14).

In accompanying my friends to the place of meeting, the idea of preaching did not occur to my mind. I went out a hearer; I came back a preacher. To my own consciousness I was carried away by the Spirit, and then and there made a medium of judgment and doom. My subject certainly did not correspond with the environment: in relation to that environment it was not only an encroachment, it was a violence and an outrage; for it seemed to smite as with lightning the benediction which involved us in light and peace, and spiritual music. Yet it could not be helped. It has always been my way to follow my uppermost thought, and to reply on the spot to the most clamorous appeal. I have seldom been able to avail myself of the comfort and real utility of delay. The action has been extemporaneous, and it is of the Lord’s mercy that in many instances it has not consumed me. My second text was in the same doomful strain:

“It I whet my glittering sword, and  
mine hand take hold on judgment; I  
will render vengeance to mine enemies,  
and will reward them that hate me”  
(DEUT. xxxii. 41).

That discourse was also preached on a summer afternoon, and under a hedge thick with wild roses. I can recall the fragrance of flowers and the singing of birds; yet by some unaccountable contrariety of feeling I plucked the divine sword from its sheath, and waved it, as if with fury, over the heads of as inoffensive a congregation as ever ploughed the land or reaped its crops. Even at that remote time I must have had a passion of my own; for one of my youthful admirers sent me a little poem, addressed to myself, which opens with these congenial lines :

“Ardent, enthusiastic youth,  
Fit herald of the glorious truth  
That God for man has died.”

So even in that first rude way of mine some good must have been done by the Spirit that has not scrupled to employ even rams' horns for the announcement of divine doom. Recollections of my own impetuosity, I may indeed say violence, have always enabled me to take a kindly view of the least controlled ways of young beginners like myself. I do not like a beginner to be too staid. Young trees should grow a good deal of wood. Heaven knows they will have pruning enough by-and-by, and not always by expert hands or the most refined instruments.

Four years after, I seem to have had my eye on great heights, as the following inscription, dated February, 1852, will show :

“Presented to Mr. Joseph Parker by the Teachers of  
the Independent Sunday School, Hexham, in remem-

brance of the pleasure and benefit they derived from the very lucid course of Lectures on Astronomy and Natural and Sacred History which he delivered in the Independent Schoolroom on behalf of the above Institution."

The book was D'Aubigne's "History of the Reformation." The inscription is signed by the Superintendent of the Sunday School. I distinctly remember the delivery of the six lectures, the lantern, the stars, the chromatrophe, and amongst the animals especially the ichneumon and the civet-cat. I had not completed my twenty-second year, so how could I, at that remote time, know much about such great and interesting subjects? At that period my favourite book was Zimmerman on solitude, from which I infer that I had hours of depression, and that I loved best to contemplate my fellow-creatures when they were at a safe distance. I have always lived much alone. I am never really happy in mixed company. But to be with those I love, those who know my way of talk, such happiness must often have a touch of heaven in its tender joy. To this divinely implanted love of happy solitude most of my work, and all its best success, must be regarded as largely due. Not in the market-place, but in the sanctuary, my soul has seen most of the divine "going." People have wondered at my energy, and asked me to explain it. There is no need of explanation. I have lived for my work. That is all. If I had talked all the week I could not have preached on Sunday. That is all. If I had attended committee meetings, immersed myself in politics, and undertaken the general care of the empire, my strength would have been consumed. That is all.

Mystery there is none. I have made my preaching work my delight, the very festival of my soul. That is all. Young brother, Go thou and do likewise, and God bless thee !

Any one caring to know more about my early days, and the conditions in which I lived until my twenty-second birthday, should read "Tyne Folk, Masks, Shadows, and Faces," published at 3*s.* 6*d.* by H. R. Allenson. In this book I have given an almost literal account of the people who affected my earliest impressions and endeavours, and who thus created the atmosphere which surrounded my progress towards maturity. Oh, those old, old times, and old, old folks ! "Sad memory brings the light of other days around me." But I must not live in reverie, for the time-floods are fast bearing me to shores of countries out of sight.

As I am now in a biographic strain, I may state that my whole life has been a preparation for the ministry of the gospel. From my earliest remembrances I have longed to deliver messages to Christian congregations. The public instinct, of which I have always been conscious, was simply irresistible. Preaching has never been to me a laborious and distressing occupation. May not this have arisen from the fact that I have never changed the gospel which I ardently desired to proclaim ? From the beginning I have loved and adored the Son of God as the only Saviour of the world. I have not played the part of an

infidel-with-irregular-Christian-tendencies. I have never been a lecturer hired to proclaim a superficial system of ethics. The gospel is Jesus Christ crucified, or it is nothing. That alone can evoke and direct the highest emotion, and without that emotion no man can ever secure a deep hold of public attention and confidence. I pray God that our rising preachers may be something more than essayists, moralists, socialists, and adventurers. I would have them all live within the shadow and the glory of the Cross, and draw from that sacred tree the one message which can penetrate the human soul, and work out in it the mystery of regeneration.

When I came first from the north, I preached in the Tabernacle made historical by the evangelical message of George Whitefield. It was a great and unsightly building, but not unworthy of the time at which it was put up. I came to London on my twenty-second birthday, and preached on the following Sunday. My first text was :

“Ye are not come unto the mount  
that might be touched, and that burned  
with fire, nor unto blackness, and  
darkness, and tempest” (HEB. xii. 18).

What a change was this from four years ago! In the interval I had been carefully studying the Greek Testament with a learned minister, and under the direction of other ministers I had been reading the best available theological works. Morning by morning I rose at six

o'clock to read theology with a resident minister. Month by month I passed through his unsparing but most useful examinations. To this process I ascribe the change in my choice of texts. Happily I was thrown into contact with ministers who could see Truth in many aspects. They were not bounded by the stone walls of ecclesiastical property, they were bounded only by the infinite horizon. Yet they were men of definite conviction, loyally following the cardinal doctrines of the faith, but full of sympathy with all that was enlightened and solid in human progress. My London senior was a man of peculiar mental capacity, and he certainly gave me the benefit of his varied and ample experience. He prescribed my theological reading ; he heard in advance all my pulpit preparations ; and he stately commended me and my work, in rich and tender prayer, to the blessing of Heaven. My senior was one of the most industrious men I ever knew, and I am thankful to believe that I caught somewhat of the spirit of his constancy and devotion. From that time and for many years I gave myself up to the study of the Bible and the careful composition of sermons. I solemnly and affectionately advise all young ministers to follow the same course. Mastery comes after long apprenticeship. For years I have never written a sermon ; but young preachers must remember that for years I toiled at sermon-writing with simple and inspired enthusiasm.

Like most men overborne, I have cheered myself, in many a drooping hour, with the hope that some day

I would retire to a cot in the quiet country, and watch the coming of the spring and all the silent miracles of summer. That imaginary cot has done wonders for me. Yet still I bear my burden in the city, and still the boom of London will not let the rural music through. Yet my soul daily sees the welcoming cot, away yonder on the bank-side, looking towards the sun, flowers climbing its gables, and spring blossoms nodding as if lovingly at its open windows. It stands within two hours of London, yet it is ten thousand miles away,—more than ten thousand—it is a whole world away: only the wings of the morning can reach it; only dreams can open its garden gate. Still that cot bids me cheer myself, and a voice sweetly sings: “The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.” And what harm, if so be the illusion helps me to carry for one day more the holy, crimson Banner that evermore goes on to victory?

This cot in the distance means more than it seems to mean. It is part of that great ministry of Illusion by which the Almighty breaks up the monotony of unending seed-sowing. Yonder is the yellow harvest. Where? Just over that brown hill—immediately beyond the oaks; in half an hour you could be there, in the very heart of the harvest-field! Only half an hour? That’s all! Then hearts up for another brief spell,—then the cot—then the golden grain—then the solemn sunset! God works miracles of restoration by his next

half-hour, or his next spring, or his coming summer. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is thus I have been brought on these fifty years. What I am going to have next year keeps me in high spirits to-day. And, curiously, it is all the more because I have not got it! Who can measure a shadow, or count the stars unseen?

And now looking back on the long line of service, does the sunshine prevail or the shadow? Would I do it all over again or not? Is not the Christian ministry a trial to mind and body? My reply shall be careful, yet definite. I have never hesitated to say that two distinctly different pictures of the Nonconformist ministry might be painted, and each would in large measure be faithful to individual experience. There are, no doubt, peculiar and wholly undesirable people,—people for whose existence in any Christian relation no satisfactory theory has been suggested; odd people; mis-shapen minds; necks most hateful in stiffness: that is painfully true; I have seen them, wondered at them, and eagerly avoided them. There are, too, many unreasonable people; some who make men-servants of their ministers, and snub them in company. Quite true. There is no need to wink at ugly facts. I want to make that side of the case as black as an enemy would make it. But the other side? Aye, the other side! The innumerable kindnesses, the tender gratitude, the noble forbearance,—what eloquence of words can do justice to these? The grip of sorrow's trembling hand, the tear of grief divinely healed, the

thanks that are too deep for fluency, the Amen of comforted affliction,—of these no man can speak without breaking down in sacred emotion. These are the rewards and the inspirations of honest service ; they are, indeed, as the very dawn of heaven ; they are certainly and literally “the joy of harvest.” Like all other ministers, I have had conflict, disappointment, and manifold difficulty ; yet making a total of my experience, and speaking of it broadly, I thank God with my whole heart that in his infinite mercy he “counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,”—that his love found me in far-off places, and by tender constraint brought me to serve the Altar of the Cross. I throw myself at the feet of Jesus, and bless him for all his love shown me during the coming and going of those fifty years of varied and thrilling service.

---

The following pages will represent almost all aspects of my ministry. They are filled with matter for which I could not find room in my principal work entitled *The People's Bible*, which runs to twenty-five octavo volumes, and contains the life of my very soul. These six little volumes are but incidental and supplementary. In no degree do they encroach upon the large province of *The People's Bible*. They are the gleanings of the harvest rather than the harvest itself. It is now with me late afternoon, but by no means a time of weariness or conscious exhaustion. God has continued to me my health; he has given me a great sphere of service; and he has

cheered me with a large measure of confidence and affection on the part of my brethren. I thus send my love to my comrades and friends, and to those who though not known in the body have held fellowship of the soul with me for many a happy year. Of one thing I am gratefully confident, if a man will work hard and make the best of whatever talent he may have, he will in the long run be appreciated and honoured by his brethren. They are glad to recognise courage, pluck, and endurance ; and their honest motto is, “The palm be his who wins it !” May we all win some little palm, and love one another for the work’s sake and the Lord’s !

JOSEPH PARKER.

THE CITY TEMPLE, 1898.



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# STUDIES IN TEXTS.

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## I.

### MENTIONED IN PRAYER.

"Making mention of you in my prayers."—EPH. i. 16.

FROM this sentence it might be supposed that a very brief reference was made to the Christians at Ephesus when the Apostle offered his daily prayer to the Father. It will be interesting to find out how much meaning may fill so short a sentence. There may be an oak in this acorn. We can soon find out whether this is so; for not only does the Apostle say that he prayed for the Ephesian saints, he also gives a summary of the particular prayer which he offered. He actually reports his own prayer; that is to say, having breathed it upwards as if into the very ear and heart of God, he puts it into his letter and sends it to be read at Ephesus. A hazardous thing to do, but only where there is lack of good faith in the doing of it; very beautiful, solemnly tender, and most edifying, when done with a child's simplicity. Who does not like to know what a child has said in prayer? To hear the sweet words is like hearing God's answer to them; and

if the child's words be feeble, like young birds that cannot yet fly, their very feebleness has a strange might of its own which makes the heart quiver and brings tears to the eyes. In this case Paul tells the saints at Ephesus just what he prayed for ; this is his great prayer :

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory [the true Shechinah], may [would] give unto you the spirit of wisdom [the wise spirit] and revelation [the heritage of all true Christians] in the [full] knowledge of him : the eyes of your understanding [heart] being enlightened, that ye may know [by the divine enlightening] what [both as to quantity and quality] is the hope of his calling [the calling wherewith all saints are called], and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding [surpassing] greatness of his power [more than mere might] to usward [more poignant and emphatic than toward us] who believe [the believing itself being a miracle wrought by the power] according [in proportion to] his mighty power, which [energy] he wrought in Christ, when [in that] he raised him from the dead, and set [setting] him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above [over above] all principality [government], and power, and might, and dominion [lordship], and every name that is named, not only in this world [this present state], but also in that which is to come : and hath put [subjected] all things [the universe in its totality] under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

## I.

Are you not struck with the intellectual compass and grandeur of this prayer ? From no mean mind could such

a prayer come. All the terms are large. No hint is here of anything but fulness, and riches, and greatness, and glory on the part of God. Your conception of God will always determine the measure and the tone of your prayer. If you have to create your own God as well as make your own prayer, your worship will be unreal and useless. What God can you make? How soon your fancy tires, and how soon all fancy is annoyed, by the meanness of its own creations! You must realise, so far as mortals may, the God that is revealed ; the God of Jesus Christ ; the Father of Glory ; the God that excludes all other possibilities of divinity ; and then your prayer will attempt to stretch itself along the whole line of his perfections, failing of course, and failing infinitely, yet the better for the holy attempt. What can so directly enlarge and stimulate the mind as a true conception of God? That, indeed, is the central idea of all true thinking. Man must have a solar thought, if he means to move within a wide and righteous liberty. That solar thought will overlook and dominate all he does, and throw upon the whole scheme of his life a subtle and holy discipline. Many stars do not make up for the absence of the one sun ; they glitter and sparkle, making the sky palpitate, but they do not warm the earth or tempt the birds to sing. So it is with our thinkings and guesses, our fancies sober and wild ; they are not without beauty or fire, but they are without God. Paul's idea of God was grand, hence the grandeur of his prayer. An infinite God makes his suppliants all but infinite. It was thus that Paul was enabled to pray with so much largeness of mind. His audacity would make us tremble, did we not know that his idea of God was altar enough whereat to plead the cause of the whole earth. He is borne out of himself by his conception of God. He speaks without fear, he pleads without reserve, he claims all that can do

good to the souls of men, knowing that when the great answer comes there is no impoverishment in God ; as when the sun has poured the light of summer on the earth, it is not diminished by a single beam. What is our idea of God ? Are we afraid of him ? Do we ask his greatest gifts ? Are we content with the crumbs which fall from his table ? Or do we pray to be swallowed up in God, to be enriched with all heavenly wisdom, to be ennobled by all holy grace, to be unworldly, spiritual, and perfect with the very purity of Christ ? Paul's great God inspired a great prayer. So it must evermore be in the kingdom of heaven. The supreme thought will determine all. If ever we are to grow out of our littleness, and altogether shake off a mere peddling piety, we must enlarge our conception of God, and take hold of him with a firmer and more expectant love. See if it be not true all through and through life that the whole mind is lifted up and ennobled just as the idea which it forms of God is comprehensive and sublime. Out of such an idea comes the true love of man : a right theology gives a right philanthropy : when we love God with our whole heart we love our neighbour as ourself. Again and again I would ask, What is our conception of God ? How do we think of him ? He is a great God, and a King above all gods. his goings forth have been of old, yea from everlasting, and from the sanctuary of eternity. From the beginning he declares the end, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done. He inhabiteth eternity, and his name is Holy. He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God. It must have been so that Paul thought of God when he called him in this text "the Father of Glory " : mark the Jewish magnificence and the Christian tenderness of the title—"Glory," that is Jewish ; "Father," that is Christian ; "Father of Glory," that is the

sacred union of the dispensations, the inbringing of things past and future into one Church and family. Paul's first idea of God was necessarily a Jew's idea, and was therefore intellectually sublime. Marvellous indeed is the tone of Jewish worship—"Great things doeth he which we cannot comprehend : touching the Almighty we cannot find him out." His way is in the sea, his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known. Great and marvellous are his ways, he doeth great things and unsearchable and marvellous things without number ; the shadow of his wing is a mighty defence, his hand is strong and his right hand is high. It was this God, exalted in the songs of Israel, with heaven for a throne and earth for a footstool, that Paul worshipped as "the Father of Glory." And in Christ's own prayer, the Father is in heaven, the Father has a kingdom, and the kingdom and the power and the glory are the Father's. Not one word will I say against the familiarity which is reverential ; but not one word can I say for any worship that does not abase the worshipper in lowliest reverence before the throne of the Father of Glory.

## II.

The spiritual intensity of this prayer is as strongly marked as its intellectual compass and grandeur. This is truly an unknown tongue to the man who is not spiritual. There is nothing in himself that answers to the solemn music of these words. He says he does not know them. For himself he declares them to represent that which is unthinkable. Within his own limits he is perfectly right. We ourselves have precisely the same experience in lower levels of life than the religious. We have it, for example, in music ; for the strain that moves one soul towards heroism and sacrifice and triumph is but noise to another,

Which of them is right? Or thus: Ask this man to say "landscape": he breaks it into syllables; he repeats each syllable with an infant's uncertainty of tone; he puts the syllables together and pronounces the whole word with an effort; but it is a sound only, nothing more! Now ask this other man to say the same word, and he says it with delight, speaks it as if it were music, says it with eyes and face and hands and with the whole body, as well as with his voice. How is this? Why did the first man stumble? Because he was blind. Why did the second man speak joyfully? Because he was a painter! Landscape is unthinkable to the born-blind; landscape is a hint of heaven to the painter's eye.

It is exactly so with religious or spiritual terms. There must be something in the mind itself which answers to them, or they will represent nothing but emptiness or confusion. Look at this huge stone slab. Two men are standing before it. One is half puzzled, half amused; the other is agitated, and his eyes are eloquent with meaning which he cannot communicate. Why this difference? They are both men, and they are both looking at the same object, yet they express the most widely different feelings. How is this? The one is an illiterate Englishman, who sees nothing but what he calls "scribble" on the slab. "It is all scribble," saith he, with the audacity of ignorance; "scribble, scribble, shapeless, senseless scribble." The other is an Assyrian, in a strange land, and the slab is full of letters which he knows well; it is eloquent with noble traditions; he looks upon its hieroglyphics as the painter looked a moment ago upon the landscape, and he longs for some kindred soul that they might have common joy in a common treasure. Does the Assyrian say, "I must be mistaken, because

this Englishman is unmoved by the words upon the precious stone"? No; in his rapture he is lifted above ignorance and scepticism, and no stranger intermeddleth with his joy.

This leads me to point out that all these spiritual words came out of a spiritual consciousness ; that is to say, they came second, not first ; they came out of something in Paul's deepest life and thought. If the Assyrian could have taught the Englishman to say the very words that were upon the slab, he would not have brought the Englishman any nearer to him in feeling. They would have been words and sounds only ; no ancestral generations would have spoken in them ; no patriotic fire would have glowed in them ; they would have been literary curiosities, not symbols of hallowed and inspiring thought. This is precisely the case with Christian words and ordinances. A man does not know God simply because he can say God. It is not true that any intelligent man can form a just opinion of religious feeling or religious doctrine. This is a sacred learning. This is a lore of the soul ; this is the wisdom of God. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." So, notwithstanding the sneering of "the natural man," Paul continued his prayer, content to be called "foolish" by those who can neither see nor judge aright.

No man's prayer can be understood by the mere letter. In the letter we see rather the weakness than the strength of any deep feeling, most of all the feeling that is religious. Love can never satisfy itself with its own speech. There is a subtle something which it can never say ; yea, and if it take "musical instruments, and that of all sorts"—

"the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer"—yet after the bray of trumpets and the storm of organs, it wants to express the inexpressible, to utter one sweeter note and breathe one gentler blessing. Poor, poor, is the letter! A thing of iron, hard and inexpensive ; a symbol, not to be followed in all the sweep of its meaning but by the heart which knows the holy secret too divine for speech. Such prayer as Paul's is not so much a letter as a state of soul, a mighty movement of the heart, a rapture, a sympathy, an urgency of the whole being upwards, a wrestling with mighty Ones unseen, ending with the overthrow of the flesh, but with a new name and a princedom spiritual and lasting. Hast thou been in such night-wars as these, my friend, and hast thou forgotten the old Jacob in the new? Rely upon it, that explains everything of the nature of uncertainty as to God and his kingdom. Our faith stands in the wisdom of men! We are not begotten by the word of truth ; we are born of blood, and of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man : we are not born of God. We must be born again! Our faith itself may be born of the flesh ; and that which is born of the flesh is flesh, whether we call it faith or by some other name. Truly there is a flesh-born faith. It stands in the wisdom of men. It lives upon clever books, clever arguments, clever sermons ; it does not live upon the very heart of God and the very blood of Christ. Give us a faith that stands in the wisdom of men, and you give the very first necessity of debate and argument. Hence, where there are merely human creeds and merely official dogmas, there is a controversial and loquacious Church. The faith is external, not internal ; and so it brings about strife and questioning of mere words and sounds. "If we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the

truth ; but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” Oh that my faith may stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God ! I would be born from above, and not from beneath. I would be hidden in the heart of my Saviour God. I would not find my assurance and my joy in wordy argument, but by simply doing the thing said to be impossible. It is so that religion is to be honoured. If you would prove the existence of God, be godly ; if you would set up an invincible argument for the utility of praying, let it be by more prayer ; if you would defend religion, be religious : when we crucify ourselves, men will begin to feel that we must be crucified with Christ.

### III.

The intellectual compass of this prayer and its spiritual intensity prepare us to expect that it will be comprehensively practical. Such hunger cannot be soon satisfied. Such “appetite grows by what it feeds on.” The prayer enlarges in the very process of utterance. As he prays, the Apostle wants more and more, riches upon riches, one abundance upon another ; it is as if he would claim all heaven, and put to the test the very fulness of God. Look at the prayer :

“ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” Now, we see both the intellectual force and the spiritual intensity of the prayer : the Apostle prays that the saints may see farther and farther into the deep things of God, beyond veils and symbols and things elementary and finite, and have

entrance into the very presence of God, and be permitted to dwell within the infinite glory and comfort of the holy place. Not only would the Apostle have the saints wise in any general or ordinary sense ; he would have them filled with the very spirit of wisdom, the spirit out of which wisdom itself comes, the wisdom which justifies her children, and is in turn justified of them ; a quickening spirit dwelling in a quickened mind ; the divine descending upon the human, and the human ascending to the divine, an action reciprocal and complex, not to be explained as a riddle, but to burn and gleam in a wisdom too complete to be lured by lies or to be satisfied by appearances. The spirit of WISDOM would be also the spirit of REVELATION —the spirit which knows revelation, and the spirit which can reveal truth to others ; an expository and preaching spirit, as well as a spirit of sympathy with revelation. Thus the true saint has the witness in himself. He knows the divine from the human. As if all his senses and faculties culminated in a still higher gift, he can say, This is Bible, and this is not ; this is wheat, and that is chaff. He is a searcher and a discerner ; and in his own degree he can say with Christ, “ I and my Father are one.”

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened”—more literally, the eyes of your heart being enlightened ; that innermost core and root of life, being gifted with far and keen vision as the result of your having the spirit of wisdom and revelation, not an enlightenment separate from it, but coming out of it and belonging to it, and attesting its reality and power by those beatific visions which make the good man’s earth a precinct of heaven. Thus the term “understanding” is included in this larger word “heart.” In the Bible, the HEART carries everything with it—it is the lamp of hope, it is the fountain of

thought, it is the sanctuary of rest : "With the HEART man believeth unto righteousness"; "Keep thine HEART with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"; "Blessed are the pure in HEART, for they shall see God."

"That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." This all comes out of the spirit of wisdom and revelation ; if the saints have that enlivening and enlightening spirit, they will know little by little the whole mystery or secret of Christ ; it will brighten upon their strengthening vision ; the things of Christ will be shown unto them, and things to come, things that have no corresponding words, yea, the deep things of God, and the material universe itself, shall become an infinite apocalypse, to be read only by men in whom is the Spirit of God. Here is the very secret of revelation. It is to be read by the inward and not by the outward eye ; to be "felt after" by the loving heart, not to be roughly seized by the rude hand. Have we the spirit of wisdom and revelation ? or is ours but the mean gift of cleverness ? Do we see with the inner vision, and thus dwell in the very temple of beauty ? or see we only the coarse stone house that time shall crumble and destroy ?

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe." No sentence in the Bible is more pregnant with meaning ; the whole energy of God is here included, and in the words which follow ; the energy of creation, of spiritual quickening, and of resurrection from the dead—the resurrection of Christ as the resurrection of humanity ; no brilliant type of it, but actually and absolutely the thing itself.

Thus the mighty prayer rolls on. To be caught on the

flood of such a prayer is surely to be borne to the threshold of heaven.

A question suggests itself. What would be the practical effect of such a prayer? What would be the effect upon our spirit and character, supposing these aspirations to be the continual and supreme desires of the soul? In such a climate what fruits would be likely to grow? In a zone so fervid what spiritual botany shall we find? It is simply impossible that these desires should burn in any man's heart, should be the true expression of his most cherished and urgent purposes, without that man striving after, and probably attaining, the very highest elevation of character. Such desires as these cannot share the dominion of the heart with any despotism that is blind or vicious. Sudden temptations may seize that heart; great storms of opposition and trial may beat upon it; but no enemy will be allowed to loiter there, no shadow be permitted to lower the temperature of such zeal. Here is an immediate and most practical advantage of prayer. It lifts up the whole level of the mind. It breaks in upon all the narrow views and mean vexations of this cloudy and troubled time, and enchants the aspiring mind with outlooks and visions boundless and full of light. Surely no man could say that sweet prayer we call the Lord's, say it and mean it, sentence by sentence, without rising above the clamour and the discontent of time.

Add to these considerations the fact, whose reality no Christian mind can doubt, that not only does prayer of this kind answer itself by the sacred elevation of mind and feeling which it creates, but that it is distinctly and graciously answered by "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory," and then we see how Christian

character is but another name for fearlessness, confidence, honour, peace, and goodwill towards men. Then a sense of triumph fills the whole soul! We are more than conquerors. All things are ours. We are exalted in the exaltation of Christ, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion; we sit on the very throne of the Lord, and we judge the things that lie below us with "the spirit of wisdom and revelation." That we may not have been realising our privileges is no answer to this argument. From this day forth let us claim them all: then shall God's omniscience have its counterpart in "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" which we enjoy; God's omnipotence will become an "exceeding greatness of power to usward who believe"; and even God's omnipresence shall be revealed in us when we are perfectly identified with him whose fulness filleth all in all. Oh, great mystery! What words of man can scale that giddy height! Speech is silent there; but that silence is the heart's unutterable benediction. Observe, in conclusion, how this great prayer begins, continues, and ends in Christ! The very mention of the name of Christ always fired the imagination of the Apostle, and brought his eloquence to its sublimest pitch. It is with difficulty that his pen can find a period when it writes the name of Christ: it brings in some near and tempting beauty; it includes some deep and crystal river; yet more and more it encloses within its widening paragraphs, until that which was apparently meant to be but an allusion expands into a complete and glowing delineation of the Lord. That is emphatically so in the prayer before us. The true conception of Christ is always a miraculous conception. As he was born into the world so is he born into every mind. The story is but one, vary the phrases as we may. To the end of time this will be true of the spiritual as

of the bodily Christ: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, and that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." We thus receive Christ through the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost we receive through Christ; mystery upon mystery, clouds that would awe us by their blackness but for their infinite wealth of stars. Oh, what a Christ was Paul's! Servile in form, fashioned as a man, equal with God, obedient unto death, crucified, tortured, raised from the dead, set at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; all things under his feet; head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all,—what wonder that a Christ so glorious should inspire a prayer so comprehensive! what wonder that an immeasurable sun should be surrounded by satellites so many and so bright!

Brethren, make mention of us in prayer. When you are alone with the King, speak for us, that we may have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself and his Son, and that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. Pray for us, that our faith fail not; that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; that we win great spoil in war and have victory in the hour of death. And I will pray for you, your leaders, your veterans, and your children. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be

strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

## PRAYER.

We have come to thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, our Father and Saviour, for all thy tenderness and love. Thy mercies are more in number than the sands upon the seashore ; thy compassions fail not ; we had sooner count the dews of the morning than number the tears of thy pity : God is love. Help us to understand somewhat of the meaning of thy love, lest we mistake thee and murmur under the rod, and think there can be no place for rebuke in a government of love. Thou hast rebuked us sorely, thou hast chastened us and humbled us with rods : yet God is love. Thou hast barked our fig tree and taken away the one ewe lamb, thou hast smitten down the one flower : yet God is love. No man can say this but by thy Holy Spirit : that we are enabled to see thy love in thy judgment is the miracle of God. Our life thou dost lead by ways we know not. When we said, Behold, there is no path here, thou didst take us through the wilderness and bring us into green gardens and great paradises. When we said, We dare not tempt the roaring billows, the plunging waves, behold, thou didst stand upon them and rule them into order. Thou hast taught us, shown us in many wonderful ways, that God is love. Thou hast lighted our daily fire, and spread our daily table, and brought us water from beneath the ice ; and, behold, thou hast been mindful of us with infinite care : therefore will we say and sing in a perpetual song, God is love. Yet thy love is law, and thy law is love ; and thou hast placed us under thy law that we may not err, thou hast given us statutes and decrees and precepts : now do thou open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law. We would not live the wanton life, we would not have licence, but the liberty of law : keep us within thy purpose, work in us all the mystery of thy good pleasure, and let thy will be our delight, our standard of righteousness, our hope of heaven. We rejoice that thou hast given us in any degree the spirit of obedience ; we believe in God and in Jesus Christ his Son, and this faith is the creation of God the Holy Ghost. May we then inquire for thy law, and meditate

in it day and night, studying it with our heart, and with an earnest desire to know and to do it all; then shall our obedience be a song, and the statutes of the Lord shall be our song in the house of our pilgrimage. We mourn our sin; it goes with us as our shadow in the summer sun; it is always there, behind us, before us, at our side, on the right hand, and on the left; a daily shame, a daily hindrance: but we bring it to the Cross, we have heard that there is a fountain opened for sin in the house of David, we have been told that the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. This is the gospel we have heard, the good news sung down from heaven; we have received it, and in a degree believed it, and therefore do we come to thy Cross, O Christ, always dying, always living, the great mystery of being, that we may know that thou hast power upon earth to forgive sins. We pray for one another: here is the old man who looks back upon life as men look back upon a shattered dream; and here are busy men, thronged with ideas that bear no fruit, busy with enterprises that return upon themselves empty-handed; and others flourishing and in great abundance, turning stones into gold and iron into silver. And here are the disappointed ones, chagrined, downhearted, eyes red with tears, feet weary with travelling, and hands that for a long time have grasped nothing but emptiness. Thou knowest their way, thou knowest what burden they can bear; save them from dejection, from despair, from suicide; and if it be possible out of their dark horizon to shoot one ray of light upon them, O Lord, let it fall now like a beam of morning. And here are the little ones, children beginning their spelling, and their reading, and their wondering, and their prayers, and starting to heaven by their first exercises in holy song: the Lord put his great, gentle, almighty arms around them, and give them to feel the gentle pressure that means security. Be with our loved ones everywhere—on the sea, in the foreign land, in the colonies, in all countries under heaven; and may a spirit of brotherhood and nearness and fellowship seize us all as if distance were destroyed and the universal Sabbath of God had set in. Amen.

## II.

**CISTERNS AND FOUNTAINS.**

"Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?"—JER. xviii. 14.

[*Revised*—"Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field? or shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?" The Revised translation in no way changes the idea of the Authorised Version.]

"WILL a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field?" Will a man make a fool of himself? Will he mistake his shallow cistern for God's ever-flowing fountain? Will a man cut himself off from the vital forces? Will a creature part with the Creator? He likes to do it; he likes to try to do it. "The fool has said," in his withered heart, "there is no God." To that debased act may a man come, though made in the image and likeness of God. The idea is that a man may cut himself from the main, that he may cut himself away from the eternal river, fed by the snow of Lebanon, and begin to make himself a little cistern—a broken cistern that can hold no water.

Think of the suicide of isolation, the madness of amputating our life, of leaving the inexhaustible, the Eternal and the Infinite, and becoming self-devouring souls.

You have seen on lower levels how this kind of conduct is regarded. "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon and the fountain that rises from the rock?" He would not allow it in business. You can point out a man, and say, "His is a very singular case; that man is living on

his capital." I reply, "What harm is there in that?" You say, "He is eating himself up—consuming himself. He ought to have his capital so invested that it would bring him a revenue day by day and year by year; and the capital should be kept intact, and, if possible, the income should be still growing." That is the very text itself from the secular point of view. This man is living on his capital; he has cut himself off from vital, remunerative, compensative agencies and ministries; and he is eating up what he has. Take care how you say so. Mayhap you are doing this selfsame thing—living on your own inside, living on your own little miserable self, and cutting yourself away from the fountains that rise out of the river of God, which is full of water. Take care lest you be consuming yourself—actually eating your own vitals!

What is about the worst thing that can occur in military operations? About the worst thing in military operations is for the enemy to get behind and cut off the supplies. That is the horrible possibility and the dreadful mischief—that the supplies may be cut off. Take care how you dwell on this as an instance of misfortune. I charge you, in the presence of God and of the holy angels, foolish man, that you are doing this very thing. You have cut off the supply; you have dismissed prayer; you are trying to live on your own miserable individuality and self-hood. Get back to the old supplies; get back to God; get back to the fountain; live, and move, and have your being in God, and then no man can impoverish you until he has impoverished God. It is God that will fail, and not you, if you be full of faith. And it is our joy, our song in the night-time, that God cannot fail! The river of God is full of water; he giveth without being

impoverished ; and if he could withhold (which is the impossibility of love), he would be little better than a graven image.

Here is an instance which illustrates vividly what I mean : it is a man who has, to the best of his ability, hermetically sealed his house, and has thus excluded the fresh air of the sharp spring and the sun of the genial summer. How he is going to live ? He has a pair of bellows, and is going to live at the nozzle of his bellows. Take care. You see the grotesque figure. Take care lest your soul should do this very selfsame thing, leaving the breezes of God which blow from the seas of his love and come over the mountains of his majesty and righteousness. You have been trying to keep your soul in a poisoned and inadequate atmosphere. Do not laugh in the market-place, when you are doing the self-same thing, with aggravation, in the church.

This is the grand appeal of the gospel. It finds a man, wherever he may be, and builds its great faith on his own acknowledged reason and his experience. Here is a man who seems to be disappointed. What is he doing ? Trying to light a gas jet ; and I have seen him strike and exhaust a dozen lucifer matches, and no light comes. A voice inquires, "Are you sure that the gas is turned on at the meter ?" It is not. You laugh at the man. Do not laugh at him ; for you are laughing at your own souls, if you be not wise unto salvation. You are trying to live without being connected with the main, with the Living God, with the Redeeming Christ. The whole plea of the Bible is in favour of union with inexhaustible sources. Very plaintive is the eternal voice, hushed into tearful whispers, as it says : " My people have committed two evils ; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,

and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." God does not, so to say, like to be forsaken. We seem by our forsaking him to make him lonely. He does not like us to endeavour to do without him, when he knows we cannot do so, and that we are engaged upon a fool's business, and we will return soon with disappointment and doubt, and bowed down by manifold disaster. He tells us, in a poignant tone, what he will do, if we will persist in living selfish lives—isolated, amputated lives. He tells us in a moment of anger—ah! his anger is but for a moment; he cannot relish what he says: "Because my people have forgotten me, they have burnt incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; to make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity." God turns. I have read of "the wrath of the Lamb"; and when God is angry, who can stand before him? We cannot trifle with God and escape.

You cannot do without God. The atheist prays downward, not upward; but sigh and pant, and wish and yearn and desire, he must; for God has said it. Do not let us live without associations that have fed us and strengthened us many times. Those old pastors—why have you left the old, old preacher, the man that prayed with you when the house was darkened with sorrow, and empty because death had been working his miracle of desolation? Have you left the old man? How did you leave him? It may have been thought right to leave him; but I would like to know the evidence before I pronounce my judg-

ment. There is a hateful way of leaving old associations—a mean and detestable way of leaving an old friend. He may have been worn out, and unable to catch your aspirations and present them in the holy language of prayer, as was thought best for the brilliancy of your transcendent but unrecognised genius ; but he has been an honest man, a painstaking teacher ; he has done well by you and your family, and you ought not to leave him without some adequate reason. You may have plucked yourself off from the ministry which was secretly feeding your very soul. So with the old doctrines. You may have outgrown them. Thank God, I have not. I stand by the old doctrines ; I love and cherish the doctrine of the Cross, the blood, the red river that flowed from the fountain of the heart of Christ. And there is no preaching worth listening to that has not at its very heart the atonement of the Son of God. We do not object to your leaving a ministry if you leave it decently, gratefully, and in a manner that becometh truly delicate feeling. I cannot expect to keep pace with all the younger minds. They travel at a different pace. Some of them have sufficient omniscience to tell what omnipotence would have done if omnipotence had been sufficiently omnipotent. I stand by the old doctrine, and the old book, and the old music. There is none that will compare with it. It finds the heart when nothing else can. I will not cut myself off from the snow of Lebanon, and make a little cistern of my own. “ If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents.” Do not be of those original, independent, self-contained persons, who will take the flocks by unknown paths and unpene-trated mountains and wilderness regions. O thou child of light, fair as the dawn, keep by the shepherds’ tents,

the old ways, the old company. Then no wolf, no man of violence, shall touch a kid of thy flock. There is a courage that is madness. There is an independence that is simple audacity. We are safe as we keep by those old friends, old paths, old songs of Zion. They will outlive temporary neglect, and the old old gospel will come back to originality and to glory.

Cut yourself off from nothing but evil. Be representatives of history ; be your past embodied. The old New Testament preachers and apologists always took their history with them. Paul said, "Brethren, I was born" ; and then goes on with his biography, and seems to say at the end, In order to upset my doctrine you must upset my character. That is the witness we want. Godliness is the best proof of God. Do not be troubling yourselves by endeavouring to find out intellectual arguments for the existence of God. Godliness is the best argument for God. Let us strive, then, for godliness, holiness of soul ; and let us be connected with all the unseen agencies, ministries, personalities, which make for the feeding and the strengthening and the consolidation of life. Never let us break with the past. When the people see us, do they uncover the head, and say, "Whose are the great reforming fathers, whose are the great thinkers and leaders —the Miltons, and the Howes, and the Bunyans, and the Wesleys, and the Baxters?" Are we connected with anybody? or are we living miserable, isolated, selfish lives? When we stand up, does a host stand up with us? Our fathers are dead indeed if they do not live in us. You are not yourselves ; and when you insult the old principles, you insult the old friends ; you go back on venerable history ; you tear the moss from the graves of the mighty dead ; you insult "the dead but sceptred monarchs, whose spirits still rule us from their urns."

My call, therefore, is to you to leave off selfishness narrowness, misinterpreted individualism, and so to live the big social life that you will be the bigger individuals for doing it. Greatness comes by greatness ; and he who cares most for foreign missions may care most for home missions. He who takes a great philanthropic view of the world is not likely to neglect the little child on the streets whose eyes are a supplication for bread. It is but too painfully clear that individualism is in some quarters utterly misunderstood. It never means isolation. Uniqueness it may mean. Speciality of character or influence or fame it may, and probably must, imply. But that is not isolation, nor is it conceit, nor can it mean the so-called independence of self-creation and self-completeness. The Ganges is individual amongst rivers, yet it flows from the Himalayan snow ; Mont Blanc stands alone amongst the mountains, yet basally it begins with the molehill and the garden slope. To sneer at individuality is to blame the sun for being brighter than the wasting candle. Individualism may be socialism at its best. A man of true might is a unity not a unit.

It is all but impossible to realise how strong for God we might be if we truly belonged to one another, and quite as impossible to realise our might in prayer if we prayed as if with one steadfast and glowing heart. I have said that truly spiritual fellowship develops the highest quality of individualism. Without the right kind of individualism we shall be poor ; with the wrong kind we shall be shattered and impotent. Let us connect ourselves with the unfailing snows of Lebanon ; then we shall not see when drought cometh. Sent by God, we cannot run in vain ; but sent by ourselves, we shall return with sheaves of wind, and with silent lips. I would have bread to eat that the

world knoweth not of, a great wealth beyond the canker and beyond the thief, an infinite fountain which no frost can embarrass or interrupt. Where is your strength? In what bank is your treasure? On what mountain snows do you rely for rill and river?

My whole intention has been to show that, unless we live in God, unless the river of our life is fed from the white snows of the mighty Lebanon, it will wither and dry up. But if we be in God, we shall be "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which shall not wither when the drought cometh." Our leaf shall be green "in season and out of season," not because of ourselves, but because the tree is rooted in the soil. The river flows over the soil; and the soil is rooted in the sun; and the sun is rooted in God—for all the stars burn on his breast. And because of this unity, and fellowship, and masonry, and touch of common feeling, we live and grow, and no man can put us down. Our own strength is little enough and frail enough; but if God be for us, our poverty shall be wealth, our weakness shall be strength, and in the darkest night we shall see the brightest star. God be with you, and you will be in the final and invincible majority. Amen.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY FATHER, we thank thee for all sweet voices that mingle in our lives, bringing them gospels, new hopes, tidings of a coming dawn. We love to hear of the better land, the higher life, the dreamless rest. Thou hast set us in stormy places ; we feel all the wind, we are tossed by the troubled sea ; for days we behold no light, and, lo ! a great fear overwhelms our heart. Yet thou dost come again ; in the wind we detect the fragrance of heaven, through the storm there comes a still small voice, and amid all the tumult some angel says to us, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." May we, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, be citizens of that city, may we live within the walls that are jasper, may we walk on the streets that are gold, may we ultimately walk by the side of the river that flows fast by the throne of God ! This is the gift of the Cross, this is the miracle of Calvary, this is thy triumph, thou Son of man, thou Son of God. We are here for a little time, amid the whirlwind and the great stress and the tremendous controversy ; yet all the while we hear of peace, quietness, love, harmony, music, heaven. These gospels cheer us in the war, and set a light in our chamber when it is dark with the desolation of death. Defend us, thou mighty One ; be our shield and buckler ; put a sword into our right hand, and teach us how to wield it ; and grant us more and more of that tender, lofty faith which overcometh the world. Amen.

## III.

### GOD, THE SHIELD-BEARER OF THE UPRIGHT.

"My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart."

—PSALM vii. 10.

LITERALLY, "God is my shield-bearer." More figuratively still, "I hang my shield upon God." The idea is that of going to war, and having God as the

carrier, the bearer, of our shield ; so that before we can be struck down, God himself must be wounded and over-powered. "My defence is of God." There are times when we need great defences. In not a few instances we may be able to find our own answer to accusation, or supply our own explanation of perplexity and difficulty of any kind ; but there arise in life crises, points of agony, when we can only be silent, having first said to God, "Undertake for me, for in this case I am overwhelmed." The assault may be utterly without foundation or reason ; circumstances may have combined in a way perfectly mysterious : you are stunned by a great perplexity ; there is no answer in your mind or in your heart. You know that there should be an answer somewhere ; you look to the whole heaven for a reply, and you feel that it will need the whole heaven to come to your assistance under circumstances so appalling.

There are times when it seems to us but a small thing, or a course quite natural, to claim all heaven as our defence. These are supreme moments. We could not always live in such expectancy and rapture. The bulk of life is commonplace, lived on an ordinary level, requiring the discharge of common duties. Yet there are times when all things change ; there are times when the whole heaven is no longer a defence, but an accusation. These are the terrible moments of life. The fool may think he can make such a noise in his own head as to escape all that controversy, but he cannot do so permanently. The wine-drinker may think to drown all this difficulty in his cups, but there is no cup deep enough to hold such a case : no light above, no solidity underfoot, no fragrance in the air. Where then is man's defence ? Let man in such moments look within ; let him trace the course of his own spirit and

action ; and if he can find in that action reasons for self-condemnation, then let him be penitent and broken-hearted, let him find God through his tears. The tears must not be selfish ; no man must make an investment of his broken-heartedness. We are tempted of the devil to bargain with God, saying to him, " If you will put such-and-such clauses into the deed of settlement between us, we shall proceed accordingly ; favour us, and we shall pray ; get us out of this perplexity, and we shall pay tithe." God does not thus covenant. Repentance must be perfect, vital, sincere, all-inclusive. He does not repent who cries simply because the consequences are so painful. Contrition has nothing to do with consequences. The real contrition goes back to causes and principles and realities. To the real contrition one sin seems to deserve all hell ; and to real contrition one sin seems to blot out all the beauty of the sky. Not until we get the right conception of sin can we proceed to the right expression of broken-heartedness on account of sin. Many a villain has wept, and said, " I am sorry," because his head ached, because his knees smote together and would no longer stand stoutly under him. That is not repentance ; these are the tears of folly and of selfishness. When, however, the heart does enter into the mystery of contrition, self-condemnation, then the heart begins to feel that the defence after all is of God.

God may be both accuser and defender. He prefers the accusation with the reluctance of wounded love ; through the accusation he causes to shine the light of the prepared defence : his mercy endureth for ever. He does many things on purpose for the sinner without seeming to do them. That is the ingenuity of love ; that is the inventiveness of fatherhood. Things are found on the road which are surprises ; bushes are aflame, but not in smoke, not

being consumed ; they are the shrines of glory, they will never turn to the ashes of destruction. So, then, God is not only the defender of the positively righteous, but he is the defender of the sinner, when the offender falls down in contrition and self-condemnation. There is a defence which has no such explanation. We are all prepared to defend the righteous. There is very little in such defence. We may so defend the righteous as to add to our own reputation ; we may undertake to reply on behalf of a spotless character in order that we may show our own character to be spotless. We may compose paragraphs about virtue, and pronounce them as if we believe them. He is the true defender of his friend who, having seen that friend's error, has also seen that friend's repentance, and who interprets the error through the contrition, and sees it melting away, dissolved under such gracious tears. If you only open your mouth for the Pharisee, the self-righteous, or the really righteous, you can claim no chivalry. You should defend the man who is utterly wrong in the one direction, and utterly broken down in consequence of it in the other. Alas ! there is no such defence. Men dare not imperil their own repute in order to save the man who is within one step of perdition, but is yet there praying and crying to be saved.

The psalmist, however, falls back upon the vital element of character : " My defence is God, which saveth the upright in heart." Let there be no mistake about this. Is God only the defender of the righteous, who have never sinned ? No such meaning is conveyed by this text. " The upright in heart " may not always be the upright in conduct. Men cannot go beyond conduct ; God goes into motive, purpose, secret thought. " The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." May there then be broken

conduct, and yet a heart truly upright before God? Yes, there may be; and that is our hope. It is through that wonderful conception, which appears to be a paradox and a contradiction, that the whole gospel of the Cross comes. Do not be discouraged. God does not look upon us as we are; for then he would see shattered vessels, then he would see character draggled in the lowest dust, then he would see conduct from which the eyes of holiness must for ever be averted. Then upon what does he look? He looks upon what we would be if we could. Strong there, we have his defence; weak there, he abandons us to every blowing wind and every tumultuous storm. You may be a good man without knowing it. What you have to judge is the uprightness of your motive, the purity and nobleness of your intention. What would you be if you could? The Apostle Paul says, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." Then if he would do good the good is done. That is our confidence; that is the pillow, large and soft, on which we lay our dying heads. We bring no wrecks and pieces of character, and say, "Lord, see how faultless this little thing is at least; behold this virtue, and note that excellency, and because of these shreds and patches of moral beauty admit us into thy heaven." That is not our plea. We have nothing to point out in self-laudation or self-excuse; we say, "Lord, when we would do good, evil is present with us; the mind rules one thing, and the flesh declares another, and there is a great controversy between two laws, spiritual and carnal. O thou Almighty God and tender Father, we want to pray; and if we do not pray, it is because the flesh has choked our throat and thrust the prayer back again to our hearts." Then is God your defence; then you are upright in heart; then all the promises are yours. Are you not cheered by this? You thought to live by regulation; you drew up

an ample schedule by which you would determine your life, and you have broken every item and point of it. You are ashamed to look at your own propositions for the year, because already, ere the year is a month old, you have broken every vow. Yet you had not broken it if you did not want to break it. Let no man take undue licence from this. Dogs will steal the children's bread, and we have no instrument at hand by which we can affright them from the children's table. Yet, at the risk of some dog taking comfort where he has no right, we must comfort the hearts that are struggling with themselves, and that every night say, "Behold, another day is spoiled; the morning prayer has been lost in the whirlwind of the day." Not so; that is to say, not necessarily so. We have often gone much farther than this, and spoken bold words to men to whom we thought we could confide a gospel, even at the risk of some man hearing the words who would go out and prostitute the holy grace of God.

We have said that sometimes a man may have done positive sin with his hands, and not have done it with his heart. We are now upon critical ground, the ice is very thin; we must be very heedful of the range and even the accent of the terms which we use, lest any man should stand up and say we have given him licence to serve the devil, and that he may do just what he pleases and still go to heaven. No, not do what he pleases; these are the vital terms. He pleases to do good, but he is weak enough to have done evil, and God will judge him by what he wanted to do, but, poor soul, did not do. There has been no unbroken day in my life. I cannot present God with one whole good action. Nor do I want to do so, in a Pharisaic sense of the term. When a man begins to criticise his actions one by one, he is apt to take an

external standpoint, and is apt to bring a very poor skeleton morality, in order to determine the value of his actions. I want to detect a living spirit within me, a spirit of purity, a spirit of chivalry and nobleness, a Holy Ghost:

“Holy Spirit, dwell with me ;  
I myself would holy be.”

But thou didst profane the language, thou didst drink deep into the poison which takes away men's minds and consciences ; thou didst run greedily after evil. True, Lord, true ; God be merciful to me a sinner ! I did it, but did not want to do it ; “Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee” ; be my shield-bearer, and let me try the battle once more with the assurance that God is on my left hand, and that no arrow can strike my heart that does not first penetrate the shield of God. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thought, and return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Where there is this integrity or uprightness of heart, all the rest will be well. But suppose a man has become intellectually heretical? That is no matter. In the long-run he will receive sufficiency of light. Let him have soundness of heart, and you need not trouble about his intellectual or speculative heresies ; he is groping his way, and he will come into the light to-morrow. Here again we must not give undue licence to any man who is looking round for permission to grow a great crop of weedy doubts in a vacant mind. God gives no such permission. If your doubts come through the medium of your intellectual vanity, they will have the upper hand

of you one day. Men cannot be intellectually vain and truly healthy. If you want to figure before your fellow-men as persons who have invented half a dozen new doubts, you will soon forget how to pray. But, speaking to the sincere thinker, the really earnest soul trying to walk the way through darkness into light, then I say, If you have uprightness of heart, integrity of purpose towards God, your heresies shall be dissolved like the cloud, and the true light shall shine upon your minds. What God wants is an upright heart ; and as for a clear, penetrating, and complete intellectual view, I know not that he asks for it. As the mind grows, the horizon seems to recede into vaster greatness. We cannot conquer all truth to-day or to-morrow ; we may have perplexity meanwhile, we may be haunted and tormented along the whole line of our inquiry ; but if the heart is sound, healthy, right away to the very core, we shall stand at last among the accepted princes of God. Do not make investments of your doubts ; do not call people together to hear how you can doubt and perplex yourselves. If you have such doubts as worry the life, or cloud the hope, or distress the spirit, you will get over them more through an exercise of prayer than through an intellectual tournament. Pray till the light comes ; when you have forgotten all the words of prayer, still continue the supplication. There is a mightier eloquence than speech ; there is a dumb appeal ; there is an agonistic look towards kind heaven.

Where you have the upright heart, all needful consistency will be guaranteed. A growing life is never a literally consistent one. Men do not always understand the meaning of consistency. They call that changefulness which ought sometimes to be called growth ; they charge some men with being given to change who simply yield

themselves to the outworking, to the great evolutionary laws, which turn buds into blossoms, and blossoms into fruit. Many a man has been charged with inconsistency who ought to have been credited with growth. This is true in matters theological especially. We may say concerning some men, "The evening and the morning are not the same day." The reply is, "The evening and the morning are the same day, not in letters, but in purpose." You might produce two discourses by the same man, and ask me how to reconcile them. I do not attempt to reconcile them, yet the man himself is perfectly consistent. In what? In purpose, in sincerity; he reveals himself day by day, he lives so that all men see, as it were, the very processes of growth and evolution. Many a man is mechanically consistent who is spiritually self-contradictory; but the spiritual is hidden, and therefore it brings no discredit upon the man. Get twelve witnesses, and they shall contradict one another in many points; and yet, if they be earnest, sincere men, giving testimony out of their conscience, there will be a line of unity, there will at the last be a solid and indissoluble consistency. They may all have been mistaken as to the clock, as to the temperature, as to some local and transient incident; and yet the true judge will all the way see that they are earnest men, in other words, men of uprightness of heart, and he will find their consistency in their purpose and in their genuine truthfulness. The fact is as little as an alphabet; the truth is as infinite as a poem. Beware of mechanical consistency even in the Church. Some men have it in their power to write down, even with lead pencil, what they believe, and what they always believed; and when they forget what they believe, they go and read it again, and say, "Yes, that is what we believe." They never change the paper, they never rewrite the words;

they simply go and read them over again, and think that repetition is belief. Other men have nothing written ; they believe in the unwritten and larger orthodoxy of love of light, love of truth, love of progress. They contradict themselves in many literal statements ; but at the end it will be found that they were men of uprightness of heart, and the poor pedant who says, " Lord, this is my pencilled creed," will be turned away to burn it in any fire that can disinfect such noisomeness.

Do we want to be upright in heart ? There is but one gospel way. The grace of God alone can make the heart true and new and beautiful. We might seek to invent novel terms for the expression of this old doctrine, but we should not amend the terms of our father. We must be converted ; in other words, we must be born again. " If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature." The critics of his age were always charging Christ with inconsistency and recklessness and even selfishness ; yet being of a living faith and grace, he prosecuted all his way, and Calvary was but a minor point in the punctuation of his history. Even Calvary was not a full-stop ; he halted there a moment, and then pursued his way in light and summer beauty, until, clothing himself with the radiant clouds, he went up out of our sight that he might be nearer our hearts. We cannot give ourselves uprightness of heart. It is not in man to make himself clean. He can make himself mechanically clean ; he cannot make himself chemically or spiritually pure. There is a mechanical cleanliness ; there is a chemical catharism. Until we have been regenerated by the Spirit, we shall not know the true meaning of uprightness of heart, or purity and whiteness of soul. " Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Come, thou mighty Holy Ghost, and out of this wreck make a man !

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may Christ thy Son be born in us this day the hope of glory. We bless thee for the Word made flesh; we thank thee that the Word thus dwelt among us. Christ knows us in the flesh; he has companied with us, he has been in our homes, he has seen our way of life, he knows us familiarly as friend may know his friend. We bless thee that thou dost not stand afar off clothed with honour and majesty unapproachable, but that thou dost come down to us in the person and name of the Son of man. We do not see God, but we see Jesus. He touches us with his right hand and with his left; he smiles upon us, he lifts us up with a mighty strength. Yea, he died for us, he gave himself the just for the unjust, he laid down his life; no man took it from him; he said he had power to lay it down and he had power to take it again, and that this great act was associated with the commandment of the Father. Thus in time we see eternity, in the weakness of the flesh we see the tabernacle of God's almighty, and in all the plain reading of our daily life we hear the music of the upper world. May we see more and more of God; may we see thy presence in the stars and in the flowers; may we hear thy voice in the song of birds, and in the song of little children. May every day be Christmas Day to the heart that loves thee; may every heart be its own Bethlehem, may every life bow down before the Child and worship the Incarnate God. We bless thee for the mystery of thy word, we thank thee we cannot understand it; thou dost transcend our mind and pass beyond the little circle of our imagination, thou dost overwhelm us with the brightness of thy midday. Yet thou dost come to us in whispers, and in tokens of love, and in gentle daily providences, and in syllables which little hearts can understand. Great is the mystery of godliness. Thou hast been good to us with great goodness; if thou hast shown us great and sore troubles, thou hast also revived us again. In our sorrow we have known thee as we never could have known thee in our joy; we see thy stars at night, we did not know their number till the sun of prosperity was

gone. How wondrous have been thy ways concerning us, how gentle even unto stooping down to our lowest estate, how pitiful even unto tears! We will say with every house in history that has known thee, "His mercy endureth for ever." Thou hast led some of us by the graveside, thou hast made to some of us the cemetery more familiar than the thoroughfare; thou hast smitten down the strong man unexpectedly, thou hast taken away the husband or the wife or the child or the sweetest friend; and thou hast done this by right: all souls are thine. To others thou hast shown great honour, and thou hast crowned some with great prosperity; yet hast thou saved them from presumptuousness, so that they are yet bending down before God like little children, grateful, teachable, full of love. Be with those who have no Christmas, no Christ, no day-doors opening into heaven—men who have outmanned themselves and have come down to the lowest life. Lord, have mercy upon such! We cannot touch them; but thy hand can reach even unto the uttermost. Send down upon us many a token of thy care and love; specially be patient with us in the time of weakness; count not our infirmities against us as though they were sins, but be gentle always to us with the love of Calvary. Amen.

## IV

## HIS STAR.

"His star."—MATT. ii 2.

WHY were not the men content with seeing the star? Many men would have rested at that point. Many men do find a kind of troubled rest just there; but the men referred to are also called "wise men." Call them *magoi*, call them astrologers, call them devotees of such poor science as was then known; still there is left behind a good deal of meaning in the word "wise." Wisdom cannot stop; wisdom never leaves the school; wisdom never finishes its education. The education that is finished was never begun. Give up all hope of a young soul—except it happen to be in that little parenthesis of life called the

time of self-conceit—that says it has finished its education. But what was seen was not “the” star; that would have been a good stopping-place: it was more. The word is not indicative like a definite article, *the* star; it is personal, it is *his* star. The moment you attach the idea of personality to things that are round about you, there comes into the heart a desire to go farther, to see more, to ask additional questions; and sometimes there steals into the heart a solemn and tender desire to pray. The reason you are stopping at the stars, if you are doing so, is that they are only *the* stars. If they should presently become God’s worlds, Christ’s stars, the Holy Spirit’s theatre of action, then you will treat them as you treat scaffolding and apparatus.

Let us say that these men were magicians and astrologers. I would rather believe in superstition than in materialism. You must believe in something. Seeing that that is a necessity of this mysterious nature of ours—to have a home, a hut, somewhere—I would rather believe in superstition than in coarse and perishable materialism. I do not want the things I can measure; then I could count them, estimate them, sell them: I want the infinite, the eternal, the transcendent,—a God that cannot be known, and who yet can reveal himself in many a touch and look of life. Materialists—if we accept the term in its coarsest, vulgarest sense—ought always to be avoided. You would not set up an iceberg in the middle of your prettiest flower-bed; you would rather say, were such a proposition made to you, “Take it away; it will chill the beauteous life, it will be out of place here; plunge it in the north seas, but keep it away from everything that is charged with delicate and tender life.” A materialist sees with the eyes of his body, and then sees only imperfectly. Superstition may be the beginning of reverence.

Superstition has upon its weird face that look of wonder which may become a look of expectant prayer. It is easy to sneer at those who hear voices, and see images, and count omens, and wonder what is going to happen because the leaf is of this colour, and the bird that just sang was so named and not otherwise ; but they are not necessarily without God and without hope in the world. I would not break a heathen man's idol until I had something better to put in its place : so long as any heathen man can bow down meaningly before stock or stone, there is hope of him. It is the man who has no God, either carved on a cherry-stone or a tree or some rude block of marble, who is difficult to deal with ; he has to all appearance no soul, no other-self, no mystery of life. I pray you therefore not to dismiss these wise men from the east by simply calling them magicians. That is the mischief of all social criticism. Once let us hit upon a name for people, and we use that name as if it were an argument. We say, "This is Buddhism,"—and then we dine. Suppose it should be Buddhism, what right have you to gorge yourself on other people's victuals? It is Buddhism ; now what have you done? You have only uttered a nickname, you know nothing about Buddhism. It is but a name to you. Why, Buddhism—it took a man with the genius of a Shakespeare and the soul of a Beethoven to think out that mysterious system of circles and spirals and clouds and transformations. Yet some poor nineteenth-century ass thinks he has settled the controversy when he says that it is Buddhism. Will that nineteenth-century curiosity ever die? The world is more indebted to fanatics, to magicians, to necromancers, to "wise" men, to men even who have spent nights and days in seeking the philosopher's stone, than the world can well tell. That instinctive quest, that knock that is never answered, that seeking that never finds,

that asking that has never returned with a grand Amen, has done more for the world than we have yet quite estimated. It is spiritual, not bestial ; it lies along uppermost lines, it does not descend to vulgarities ; in it there is a genius that narrowly escapes inspiration.

I like the idea that other worlds may be interested in this little world of ours. It is poetry in a religious attitude that points out the fact that the stars are caring for us. There is nothing in that idea that can be sold or bartered, and yet it comes into the soul like a real living comfort.

Wise men say, "Look, they are talking about this world ; you see their lips moving, don't you ? they are all looking down upon this little earth, there is not one star amongst them that seems to be looking at any other star ; the whole galaxy of light is focussed upon this little lost world." Perhaps that is Buddhism ! I like it. I do not like the idea of loneliness, desertion, forsakenness, no other world caring anything at all about us. We have been very contemptuous in our scientific moods regarding our own earth : we have said that if it were extinguished it would be as if a very tiny spark in a very great building were put out. It may be ; I do not know enough about it to say whether it is so or not : but whoever comes to me, angel or man, prophet or spirit invisible, and says, "All the stars of God are thinking about this little earth," I feel elevated, ennobled, enriched ; I feel that the earth is no orphan, no lonely waif or stray on the streets of the universe, but a child cared for, watched over, and loved with ineffable affection. Beware of those people who never look at the stars. They can never look at you. They can look at you in a representative capacity, as a client good for costs—any way, a customer who will

probably take a commercial view of Christmas-time, a figure that cannot go out quite naked ; but such people, who have no stars in their sky, can never see you—the incarnate spirit, the immortal man. Things go together. There is a religion of sequence and cohesion and consummation. The universe is not a series of unrelated atoms, it is an organic whole ; when it bends in prayer it bends altogether.

Wise men saw this star. We should see more if we looked better. There is a great deal of looking and very little seeing ; and there is a great deal missed for want of looking. We have often had occasion to quote Sir Isaac Newton, who said he was not conscious of surpassing any of his fellow-creatures unless it was in the mere accident of attention. It is concentration that gets rich. It is intensity that brings back an answer to every prayer. There are some prayers you could not expect to have answered, because you did not mean them to be replied to. God knew it. When he saw your soul in that slip-shod mood, its look was not the look of earnestness, its cry was not the emotion of want. How much there is to be looked at ? How much there is to be looked at that cannot be touched ? The Lord has given us very few things we can handle. He knows the mischievousness of our undisciplined fingers, so he keeps a great many things out of our way. That is precisely what you do with the children.

Your room in which you have all your little household treasures is a perfect picture ; you put two little children three years and five years old into it for two hours by themselves, and then go and look at it ! The Lord keeps us well down here with a few flowers scattered about us, knowing that if we pluck these he will grow more next

year. But most of his things he keeps on the shelf: it is called the horizon, called the sky, called the zenith, called by any name that signifies safety and unapproachable-ness. Yet all these things are to be looked at. The Lord does not frown upon our telescope. If he might smile, it would be when a man first discovered a series of lenses through which he thought he could see the stars a little better. The invention of astronomical spectacles was no doubt very wonderful; but, blessed be heaven! there is no arm long enough to touch the stars. They cannot be let out, they cannot be let out on lease; they cannot bring in ground-rents, they cannot be utilised in any commercial way: yet they can be looked at—red, blue, white, golden, silvern—how multifold in colour! Blessed are they who look up to the pictures that are above, hung well up against the cornice of heaven still visible and intelligible and appreciable, meant to help us in their own direction. Yes, the heavens were meant to be “considered.” Why did the psalmist get so much religious profit from the heavens? Because he considered them. What is it to “consider”? It is to put things together; to put them on the one hand and on the other, and look at them in their relation, their separation, their unity; it is to put them in one scale, and in another scale, and to balance them; it is to get out of plurality of material unity of conception, so that all the things that make up this great universe and which are recognisable by us shall be brought into sequence, and all the sequences shall leap into one sublime conclusion. What losers are they, yea what paupers, for whose benefit no provision can be made, who can look upon Orion and not know it, upon the Pleiades and not uncover his head in wonder and reverence!

The star referred to was remarkable because it represents

all the matter that points to something greater than itself. Pascal said, "I am greater than the sun, for whilst the sun could fall upon me and crush me to death, I should be conscious of defeat whilst he would be unconscious of victory." All matter says, "I am an index, I am an uplifted finger pointing far away, showing the road along which you must travel if you would find the real light and the real beauty and the real majesty." Who would build his house around a guide-post? Who, having seen a finger-post on the road, would say, "This is the place! bring my things here; this is what I have been looking for, this will make a beautiful ornament in the centre of my home; I will build just round about this post, and then I cannot be wrong"?

Who would do so? Does the traveller speak this tongue? No; rather he draws to the post and reads upon it that this is the way to the next town. He says, "This is not a resting-place, but a starting-point; if I tarry here, it must be but for a few moments; I am told by this legend that the place of which I am in quest is farther on; a mile more, and I shall go through the gates into the city." This is the use to which "matter" should be put. It should be regarded as pointing to something better than itself. To whom did this star point? To One born—born King; and then the alphabetic meaning is given—born King of the Jews,—a term to be enlarged into the Sun of Righteousness, filling all the earth with mornning and summer. Kings of an earthly kind are born simply in succession, and have to fill up the next vacancy. They came without knowing it, they had nothing to do with the matter; when the King-babe was born, he did not know whether he was a plebeian or an aristocrat or a royal personage. Babies are indistinguishable alike at a certain moment, but the

born-king goes to his place by right. There is always room at the top. There is always room for God's kings. They may have to take a circuitous route, but they are always going towards their destination ; and the men that crucified them one day will hosanna them the next, and both the crucifixion and the coronation by such men are equally contemptible. Robert Browning had to come to the throne ; but, as Archdeacon Farrar told us, for fifty years Robert Browning was a by-word, and a hissing, and an object of scorn,—and they are just about to bury him in Westminster Abbey. The people are not always right. Even the critics are occasionally wrong. Even skilled scribes find it extremely difficult to criticise a piece before it has been played or a sermon before it has been preached. They attempt it, and have to pay for it, and it is right. Yet Browning went steadily on through all the clouds of obscurity. There stands the fact, that through those of us that cannot understand him but would do so if we could, and through sneerers and scorers and men gifted in the damnable art of hissing, he has gone forward, he is throned and crowned among the princes of literature. What is true in these conspicuous instances is true in all the departments and ramifications of life—true in the kitchen, in the parlour, in the church, in the market-place, everywhere : that all God's children born to him must go to the throne.

Many have seen the star who have not seen the Christ. Many would be astronomical Christians who would not be self-sacrificing Christians. Many believe Christ without believing in Christ. Yet it is in that little preposition that the whole life lies. We are not asked to admire Christ as a character in history, we are not asked to be dazzled by his example, we are not invited to consider

how liquid in its purity is the stream of his eloquence : we are invited to behold him on the Cross—while on earth he was never off it—and to cast ourselves with all the fulness of our love and trust upon him, not admiring him at a distance, but trusting him as the God and Saviour of our hearts. “ His star.” Which is his? How can I tell it, when the whole sky burns with countless lamps ? The sky staggers under its weight, its load, of worlds ! “ His star!” Which is his? Are not all his—his by every right? The great ones, palaces of infinite magnitude ; and the tiny specks that lie like pollen scattered on the highways of the universe. Are they not all his? I watched them yesternight when they were out in their Christmas pomp, and wondered which was Christ’s. Some ranked in geometric file and order, as if awaiting the survey of the King, others leaping, glittering as it keeping some holy revel in halls of glory ! Said I but last night : Which is his? Quite his? His as others cannot be? Do they not all lead one way—even to the Bethlehem of new life, new suffering, new heavens? Would any star lead me but to him? Are they not all Bethlehem-guides? If they could lead me otherwhere, it would be I who led, not the stars. Man can force every star to light him to the devil. Men have so used sunshine and music and love ; men have paved their way to hell with the very jewels of heaven. His star—his one star—which is it? That one blazing in the northern sky—steadfast, vigilant, eager to say what never can be spoken? Is that his? Or that white world shining in the lustrous south like a diamond glowing on the breast of heaven?—that must be his. I want to know which is his. Is it that babe-star, quite the least in the household of the worlds? Has that infant-light come to guide the erring earth back to the track of worlds obedient? They are millions thick on

that great blue dome. I will ask my heart. The heart beats the best telescope. Tell me, fond heart, which is his star? Speak to me in my mother tongue. Tell me, as my mother would have told me, which is his—quietly, quietly. Hark! the heart says—That star is Christ's which leads thee to self-sacrifice, to service for others, to momentary humiliation. That star is Christ's which leads thee to himself! Bless thee, fond heart! thou hast spoken like my mother.

## PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come by way of the Cross that we may pray. How to pray, Lord, teach us. Give us the larger view of this holy exercise, so that it may become song and communion, adoration and petition. Hear the prayer thy servant prayeth; have respect unto his voice; hearken thou unto his supplication; hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. May our prayers be conquests; may we be raised above all time and space, and commune with God as love mingles with love and light with light. Thou hast been good to us with great goodness; all thy way towards us has been a way of mercy; thou hast bedewed it with the tears of pity, thou hast enlightened it with the glory of thine approbation. Thou knowest all our lives; thou knowest the burdens we carry, the stings that torment us, the clouds that are filled with threatening, and the hidden pits that are nearing our feet. But all is well, for thou art with us; we will take boat on any sea, if thou, sweet Jesus, wilt but sleep in the hinder part; we will go through any jungle, if thou, Mighty One, wilt accompany us through its darkness. All our lives are testimonies to thy goodness: thou didst rock our cradle; thou didst go with us day by day to the little school and the great school; thou didst turn the pages over for us when we first read thy book. Thou hast found for us bread in the wilderness, and honey in the rocks, and surprises of flowers in desert places; we will say of the Lord, "His mercy endureth for ever." His name shall not be silently received in our hearing; we will laud and magnify his holy name while immortality endures. Sometimes thou hast led us by dark roads; sometimes the journey has been all in the night-time; but we are here this day, the monuments of thy preserving care: not unto ourselves, but unto our Father, would we offer every tone of praise. And some are not here; and some are here, yet absent; their souls are dead; they fill the space, they do not breathe the climate; their hearts are enwrapped in folly and selfishness. Hear thy people when they praise thee for thy goodness. Hear any special song that any heart may be singing because of

thy providential care and love in bringing back from long distances to familiar places. Hear any special cry of distress that may not shape itself into words ; listen thou to the heart-prayers that have never spoken in the language of men. Come to us according to our need and make our loss a gain, and out of the dust may we spring, never more to be overthrown. Be with our loved ones everywhere ; if we love them the more because they sin, our love is lighted by thine own. Thou lovest the sinner, thou didst die for him that wronged thee ; thy Cross, O Christ, is the open highway to forgiveness and peace and liberty. May we this day seize all the blessings of the Cross, and make ourselves rich with them through God the Holy Ghost. Hear thou the prayer thy servant prayeth for all this people, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. Amen.

## V

## REMEMBERED PRAYERS.

" I        prayed        and said——"—NEH. i. 4, 5.

HERE is a man who remembers what he said in prayer. That ought to make him conspicuous for ever. The prayer was not a short one ; it occupies some seven or eight verses, and the verses are long. The man says he prayed all this, and he remembers every petition he offered ; he did not throw his prayers away, he kept copies of his letters to heaven. This ought to make him one of the most remarkable men in the Church. What did you pray last week ? Did you pray ? Prayer is not easy. To gabble is a fool's exercise : to pray drinks the blood. There ought, if we were really in earnest, to be nothing remarkable in remembering one's prayers. We remember our diseases, how the pain began, how it worked its way through the quivering frame, how at last some relief came, and then final release from agony. Nor are we ashamed to tell the tale ; we think our friends will be pleased to

hear what diseases we have had. Some people have no keener delight than to tell others what they have suffered ; they suppose their friends will be interested to know when they began to feel pain and at what o'clock the devil of pain left them. How curiously we are intellectually fashioned ! Why can we not let the dull tale alone ? Who wants to hear it ? You have told it to some of us seven times over, and still you think we are interested in the poor, chilling story. We are not. Why don't you tell us your higher experiences ? When did you pray ? and what did you say ? and how did heaven take it ? Change the level of your talk ! Has your soul no history ? has your mind no record ? Is it always toothache, neuralgia, rheum, pain, and agony and sleeplessness ? Is the body to have all the scroll ? Why not dismiss it in a sentence, and come freely and lovingly to tell us the story of the mind ?

This is what the Bible does pre-eminently. The Bible thinks we will be interested to know how the soul got through it all, what fears, what temptations, what sudden appeals like sudden squalls fell on the little boat of life. No wonder we have small taste for the Bible, because the Bible deals with the soul, the mind, the conscience, the part immortal, the part divine. This is so everywhere and every day. If a woman were butchered in London, men would awaken you at midnight with special editions to tell you the ghastly tale ; column after column would appear ; all the coroner said would be put down as if it were of consequence. If a paper were to report that a man's soul had been saved, it would be laughed into the bankruptcy court. Yet this is a most Christian nation ! This is all on the same level with the talk about the body. You remember the headache that you have told about, and the woman killed, and the child run over by a cart-wheel ; all this is of some

importance, it must not be ignored : but what we want to be at is the diary of the soul, its first glimpse of liberty, its first glance of God. We are in danger at this point of some poor weak soul saying that such things are too sacred to be talked about. That is a lie minted in hell ! These things are only so sacred because we have so deeply secularised every other part of our lives. We should lift up the depressed places, and having elevated the general level of our thought, these other things so transcendently spiritual would become more naturally part of our mother tongue. You have spoken possibly so little about your soul that now you have no soul to speak about. Clay, clay,—that is what we have made of ourselves. "My spirit shall not always strive with men." There comes a time when a man's soul goes out of him and leaves the poor clay-pot alone for Death, the world's grim scavenger, to call for it when he can stoop to so base a humiliation.

Here is a man who has had memorable prayers. This is not the only prayer Nehemiah ever prayed. He prayed maybe a thousand or ten thousand times, and he remembers word for word, as it were, one of them, five of them, or more. The great commonplaces of devotion fall into their due relation to one another. Only the mountains are marked. Are there no mountains in your soul's history? Are there no great swelling altar-hills that would ambitiously elevate themselves to the stars? Is it always to be that same old pain, that same old headache, that same sleepless night? Nehemiah reports the very words, and yet possibly he did not utter any one word amongst the whole of the sentences here given. When shall we get men to know that the words are nothing? Possibly Nehemiah did not utter any one of these words exactly as we find it here, and yet he prayed this very prayer. There

are purists that struggle about words—whether you said now, or presently, or immediately, or promptly, or forthwith, or instantaneously. Such men can never get the key of your soul. You did not say any one of these words, and yet you said them all. The soul does not palter with syllables when it quotes its great histories ; it writes down its present memory of great impression. This is poetry, this is not statistical religion ; it is imaginative, and therefore real ; it is spiritual, and therefore it overflows the letter, and commits the crime of inconsistency. Nehemiah might write his prayer in twenty different forms, and yet he would say concerning each form, "I prayed thus," "I said." When will men distinguish between the form and the purpose? the mere setting in words and the vital, eloquent, speechless desire?

Some prayers can never be forgotten ; they are memorable prayers ; we go back to them for help. We say, "Once we saw the Lord," and said, "It is sweet reading, it is like reading tender songs of tenderer love." The paper is yellow on which we wrote the prayer, but no flower in all summer's garden is so lovely, no daffodil so fair a yellow. Close your eyes that you may see the better, and look back over your life and tell me if there have not been memorable altars, historical prayers, and if there stand not in your yesterdays a great altar-stone that hand of man can never overturn. You remember that? One was in the sick-chamber. You did in very deed pray that day. You could write out the prayer now, and yet not one solitary word that you have written was spoken in that agony. Yet the prayer was all delivered. The prayer is the desire, the soul ablaze, the life importunate, man determined to overthrow consenting Omnipotence. You won that battle with God ; he was teaching your

fingers to war ; he meant to be overthrown ; he challenged you that you might that night be rich with one great victory. You thought you could not pray, you said you had never prayed aloud, you would be afraid to let any one hear you pray ; and yet you prayed in two ways. You remember it every word, don't you ? You prayed that good man to pray for you ; that was the beginning. You did not go face to face with God, but you said to God's servant, " Pray with us." It cost you a great effort to say that ; the petition nearly choked you. You had asked him twenty times to take hospitality with you, and had done it in a graceful, easy way, but when you said on that ever-to-be-remembered day, " Pray for us," he could not help it ; you had made him pray ; you constrained him by the tender violence of necessity and love ; and through him you touched God.

Do you remember what the good man said ? If you cannot quote the words in any literal sense, you can quote his spirit, and tell now how even twenty years ago he wrestled with God, and God permitted him to touch the muscle of his strength, and handed over his almighty like prey taken at the spear-point. Be rich with these memories, and you never can be lonely, you never can be poor ; you must always be in the fellowship of God, and always be rich with the eternal inheritance.

You remember how you once prayed on the sea. What prayers that drear old sea has heard ! You remember when the vessel was nearly wrecked, when thunder upon thunder fell upon it, how you lived your lives all over in one flashing moment ; how you saw everybody at home and everybody you had ever seen with the eyes of your love, and how you groaned and cried and looked dumbly, but meaningly, to heaven. Have you ever prayed on shore ?

Was it a coward's desire? Was the eloquence but the shout of despair, or was it the music of love and trust and assured hope? Every man must answer for himself. Once you were in great extremity, and you asked me to pray for you; you said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and you would have constituted even me into that righteous man that you might have some hope in prayer. Now the thunder is silent, the lightning has died in space, and there is a great calm. Have you asked me to return thanks? What, shall we pray for bread, get it, eat it, and forget at the end to bless the Giver? He was a wise man who had grace after meat as well as grace before it. Bethink you of all these things, and tell me what are you talking about, your soul or your body, what you made last week in one transaction, or what you took in battle with God? Ah me, I know no sight so ghastly as a man who has let his soul die! Not a word of music do you hear from him, not a sigh laden with ineffable desire towards things transcendent and everlasting; but all about bullocks and fields and houses and balances,—things men were meant to talk of for a moment, to refer to interstitially. But we have made the interstice the great gap of our life, and we are busy filling it with the rubbish of time.

All our prayers need not be of this elevated and memorable kind.

We cannot do without life's commonplaces as well as life's romances. Romance may be the true history; poetry may be the real fact. We cannot always rise to the same altitude. The world could not be all mountains, or it would be all levels. Too many miracles would come back again into commonplaces. Thus extremes meet. But do let us remember our special prayers, the great

deliverance, the light that shone at midnight, the angel that came when we had one moment between us and eternity. Do let us remember how God made extremity his opportunity. These things should be dear to us ; they are the very blood of the soul. Prayer is not only one or an occasional great effort ; prayer is a climate. We are to live and breathe in it. It should be easy for us thus to pray ; then it will be less difficult for us to pray in the great emergency. Woe to him who never prayed till he was face to face with the supreme danger of his life ! He has had no graduation ; he cannot speak the language fluently in a moment ; he ought to have trained himself day by day, then, when the great opportunity occurred, he would have spoken with a nobler dignity and a tenderer persuasiveness. Men ought always to pray, and not to faint. "Pray without ceasing" : "in everything give thanks." Thus, when prayer becomes a habit of the soul, supreme or occasional efforts are robbed of their terror, and we enter upon their execution with confidence and hopefulness.

How are we going to make our lives memorable ? Nehemiah made his life memorable by communion with God and by service for man ; the same opportunity lies before us. Listen to the talk of any one day, write down your memory of it, and tell me how many things in it are worth talking about. There was a time of which it is said, " Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written,"—heaven's own reporter was there, the scribe took down the holy conversation uttered in silent fire, and it abides there, and the talkers shall one day be gathered jewels. Perhaps some of you have some secret record of good things spoken and good deeds done,

and great prayers uttered. They are the dearer to you because they are not published. Do create them, preserve them, and refer to them ; they will be a little Bible to you in the dark and dreary days that may be in store for your struggling life. What memories have we of the sanctuary, of that great prayer that sounded like an act of amnesty ? for the prison doors flew open and captives ran into the light. You remember that day ?—that great discourse of which the preacher was as unconscious as the hearer as to its mere structure, spoken by some angel within, that angel heaven-instructed ?—how the clouds flew before it, and all heaven became morning, and the morning became summer, and the summer gave us rest and hope ? You remember that ? What is your memory of ? Your aches, pains, losses, distresses, fears—a memory of gossip and folly and prattle ? or a memory of great communion with heaven, mighty, glorious, heroic recollections of good deeds done, great sacrifices offered, great destinies realised ? Blessed be he who at the last can say, “ I was in great fear and trouble and sorrow and distress, and all the earth was shaking under me, but ‘ I prayed and said——’ ” Some prayers are so noble, so true, so tender that God permits them to be their own great answers ; yea, rather, they are his own inspirations put into human words.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to thy house to complete our own home. The house is no home until we connect it with thy sanctuary ; then the fire burns well, then is the bed the sanctuary of sleep and sweet rest ; the bread then is sacramental, and the whole office of love a beauteous ministry. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth, sanctifying all their dwellings, and making their houses homes. Lord Jesus, abide with us ; never go away : sit down with us at the table ; break our bread for us, and feed our hearts with love. Be our house-keeper, —except the Lord keep the city the watchmen shall be blind. Keep our houses, our lives, all our interests. Number the hairs of our head ; watch us as if we were of importance to thee. Are we not important to thee, thou Son of God ? Thou wast wounded for our transgressions, thou wast bruised for our iniquities ; for us thou didst carry the Cross : we are therefore of consequence to thy love. Find in us the image of God, and restore it in all its beauty and grandeur ; lead us away from all that is deathly and mean and dishonourable, and lift us up to the gate of heaven, the entrance of the dwelling of God. Pity us in our littleness, vanity, and infirmity ; urge not against us thy great power : for who can stand against the thunder of God ? May thy gentleness make us great. Surround us with love, indulge us with mercy, feed us with grace. The Lord hear us in these things, and surprise us by great replies. Amen.

## VI.

## THE AVOWED AND THE REAL IN RELIGIOUS LIFE.

"But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."—LUKE xxiv. 29.

THAT was the avowed reason. That was really no reason at all. There was nothing false in the statement. As a matter of fact the sun was getting towards the west and the day was nearly done: but that had nothing to do with the invitation. This was civility; this is an exercise of the grace of hospitality. The reason given is that the day is nearly over, and you, unknown Stranger, have had a long walk with us, you had better remain during the night, and in the morning you can resume your journey. All that was subterfuge. The heart does not come to its real self all at once. Few of us can be real. Jesus Christ himself—for by that name we now know him in the narrative—"made as though—" This is the counterpart of what the men did. He was not going any further. As a mere matter of literal fact, he could have gone a few miles further on; he had no intention probably of doing so,—"he made as though." That is what Christ is always doing—trying us, developing us, showing us to ourselves, forcing us into positions, relations, and responsibilities. If he had asked to go in, we should have had nothing of this civility, we owe all the development to his making "as though he would have gone further." Seeing his attitude, the two friends said, "You must be tired, as we are; come in, remain all night, or stay a while at least: for it is toward evening." How glad we are sometimes of a pretext! how delighted we

are to invent excuses ! The heart must come up and go out and tell its tale of suffering or of joy, and many a time it talks another language than its own. Not, let us repeat, that there is anything false in the statement. We may be true, and yet may not be wholly and completely true. We may avail ourselves of one of two courses, trying the one simply because the other is urging us to try it. We should never have thought of it but for the other, the unnamed and unavowed action.

Thus the Lord trains our life, drawing us into partial confessions, suggesting to us initial steps, pointing out one road when he means us to be led step by step into another. The Lord handles us as we are able to bear his handling. He is not a God of thunderbolts only, though a million of them lie round about him saying, "Here we are !" He is the God of gentleness and kisses and love and tenderness : he is Love. We do not ourselves know all that we are talking about. No man is in his speech really as religious as he is in his heart if he be a sincere man. We sometimes explain why we go to church : we tell our friends that the church is near, or that it is customary to attend church, or that the singing is delightful, or that our friends assemble there and it is agreeable to meet them now and again under such circumstances, or the preacher is a personal friend. All this is nonsense. Yet it is not false ; only we do not tell the real reason. We dare not. Many a man, therefore, goes to church on the pretence that it is near, when really in his heart he is hungering and thirsting to be there, and would go if it were ten miles away, for reasons he has never told his dearest friend. We "make as though," when we do not mean it. We say we go to hear the singing, and we really want to hear something else ; we say we go because it is popular and interesting, and that

excuse is enough for our friends to know ; but if our hearts could be read by them, they would see that our reason is quite of another scope and quality. But Jesus will begin with civility. If we ask him to come into the house, and look at its magnitude and accommodation, and take a mouthful of bread with us, he will come in. He is a gentle Christ. We might invite him to see his own portrait, to see himself as a little child in his mother's arms, he would come in ; we might invite him to dine with us, though we have never gone to his church, and he would come in. If we can only begin at the point of civility, he will accept us at that point ; if we are moved towards him with hospitable intent, he is willing to join us at that initial stage. He wants to get into the house ; he will come in by any door we open. He does not say, "I will drive up to your front door in a chariot of gold and with steeds of fire, and you must receive me in state." He says, "I will come in by the front door or by the back door ; what I want to do is to come in, to see you, to help you, to love you, to make your house a home."

So much for the avowed reason, "It is toward evening, and the day is far spent." O self-deceiving heart ! What honest lies we tell to ourselves ! What was the real reason ? Why this invitation ? The Man is a stranger ; he has never been consciously seen before ; he has, so to say, been picked up by the wayside ; he came into the conversation by the masonic right which every man has to inquire into the tears of another. If they had been in laughter, in dance, and mirth and glee, he might not have spoken to them, but when men are in sorrow we have a common right to say, "Why these tears ? can I ease this burden ? can I bring back the sunshine ?" They knew nothing about him, and yet here at the end of a few miles' walk they say, "Abide with us, be one of us, come into our house ; 'it is toward

evening, and the day is far spent.’’ It might have been midnight ; they would not have asked him if they had not liked him ; they would have allowed him to pass on if he had been another kind of man. Why this invitation ? When “ their eyes were opened, and they knew him ; and he vanished out of their sight,” then they were real, “ And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures ? ” That is the reason ; that always opens the house door ; that always finds its way to the cupboard and the bed and the purse and to everything a man has ; make his heart burn within him, and he reckons nothing that he has his own. That is the explanation of apostolic communion ; that is the secret of real social union and co-operation. Now we know that the invitation had nothing to do with the weather or with the clock, with the evening or the spent day ; now we know that they wanted this Man to come in and live with them for ever. Why ? Because he had the keys of heaven. The man who has the keys of heaven, and the gift of revealing unseen kingdoms, and bringing the soul nearer to God, is at home everywhere. All bread is his. If he has no literal bread, he says, “ I have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of : man shall not live by bread alone, but by a thousand ways can God keep life’s lamp burning.” Nothing opens the house like the Gospel. We feel that it brings a music of its own along with it ; we want the great spiritual singer—for truest eloquence is truest music—to abide with us. These men had known the Stranger only a few hours, and yet they felt that if he went away it would be midnight, they would be orphaned. We know some men at once. Other men we never know. But the true, loving soul sent immediately from God, why, we know it by the touch of hand. The hand is the soul.

Why did these men want the Stranger to remain with them? Because he had created an appetite which he only could satisfy. As for the common bread, take it all, but give us the bread of life, feed our souls with love; oh, abide with us, and the house shall be a palace of God, and whatever little crust we have shall become as the body of God. This is the explanation, this is the design of all true preaching,—to get at the heart, to make the heart burn. We cannot do without fire. Where the fire of God is, evil is consumed; where there is a furnace of love, all dross is destroyed. In some hearts the fire has never been lighted; they are cold and dark; they have never seen God, they have never touched the Eternal, their eyes have never been opened; they are blind hearts, no white angel has ever come within the ken of such blindness. The Gospel was not made to puzzle us, to be the greatest problem presented to the intellect, to be a miracle in metaphysics; the Gospel was sent to touch the heart, to warm the whole life. We can only work when the life is hot with love. This is the power of the Gospel. There is no power like the power of the love of Christ for enlarging and energising and warming the heart. O preacher, thou must thyself be hot with the love of Christ, or thy words, dainty and eloquent, will be but as ice in some beauteous form—a mockery of diamonds! Men should in the Church feel the action of a peculiar, sacred, uplifting heat. When the day of Pentecost was fully come there sat upon each of the disciples, as it were, a tongue of flame; when Saul was converted he saw the white flame at the Damascus gate; when Paul told the story of his conversion he said it was associated with a marvellous light. What is light but the beauty of heat? Until we recover the glowing heart we shall have no true power in the world. We have ground down enthusiasm. We have thought that propriety

was better than passion, and that decorum was more to be valued than transport. Who said so? Dignified love, consecration kept within bounds of decorum,—who can tolerate such palpable paradox? “Did not our hearts burn within us?” Therefore we said, “Come in, thou unknown Stranger; thou art unknown no more, we know thee; we could not name thee, but we know thee without knowing thy name; all we want is a name, and if that name were God, we could believe it.” In these elevations we see what is meant by the Cross and the crown and the kingdom of Christ. Seated on some mountain of snow, we cannot understand the love of God: we must have it burning in us before we can represent it either to ourselves or to others.

Here, then, we have first the avowed reason: “It is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” That is no lie; there is not one tinge of falsehood about it: but the men had not got right down to their true selves. Secondly, we have the real reason: “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?” Did we ever hear such talk before? How it rolled like a river! how it burned like the midday summer sun! how it sang like spiritual music! what a solo it was, yet to what choral richness did that voice rise! Oh, was it not wonderful! Will not every step of that road from Jerusalem to Emmaus be a step heavenward? Let us go back and look at his footprints, for even there flowers must be growing; where that Man trod consecration was completed. This is the enthusiasm we want; this is the sacred madness that would make itself felt through all the world.

Notice, then, that Christ accepts even civility. He was

a stranger, and the Jews were civil and hospitable. He made no excuse ; he did not say, " I am going further," " he went in to tarry with them." He did not say, " This is too poor a house for me to come into." To the true soul there are no poor houses. The roof makes the house sacred ; the door opened with love makes the poorest little home a palace of magic. When our ministers will only go to a certain kind of houses they ought not to have any houses to go to ; they are not men of the Cross. When a minister makes any distinction between a man who has ten thousand a year and one who has a shilling a year, he has lost his Christ. The minister that deals in such distinctions ought to be a failure, and will be a failure. The Lord will feed him with disappointment, and mock him with words without meaning. Jesus would have gone into the grandest house in the place, and he would have gone into the lowliest cot ; his greatness made all houses alike : only God could come to Bethlehem.

Notice, also, that the heart knows the true preacher. There be those who think they can in some way make preachers ; but their hands are unequal to that miracle. The preacher can neither be made nor put down : he is the creation of God and the gift of redeeming love. A man is not necessarily a preacher because he despises all instrumentalities, educational aids, and generous ministries : he may hardly even have wisdom enough to be a fool. The ministry must be proved by its results. Where men's hearts glow with holy love, there is the true ministry.

The heart knows the true music. What is it in us that always knows the truth ? Surely it is the divine element, it is that wondrous presence associated with our being made in the image and likeness of God. Many a man enjoys

music who does not understand it ; it fills his soul ; he thinks he has heard it before. We always think that about those we love. Where did we see this man before ? Why, we saw him in eternity. This is one of the mysteries which must comfort the soul when many explicable arguments fail to reach the heart's necessity and the soul's great wonder.

The true preacher opens the Scriptures. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures,"—oh, that some clerk had been there to take it all down ! We could have done without the rest if we could but have had that one long speech. And as he went on from passage to passage, their hearts burned, glowed, within them ; they forgot all time and distance and labour and pain, caught in that lofty rhapsody. They never were so far into heaven before ; to leave that elevation was like coming down from the summit of mountains immeasurable. Preachers must expound the Scriptures. Is there anything so difficult to remember as the text ? Who ever quotes the text which the preacher amplified ? Better forget the sermon than forget the text. The sermon is nothing apart from the Scripture on which it is founded. Fill your sermons with the Bible,—not with mere texts, with odd and eccentric citations of Scripture, but with the Biblical genius, the Biblical spirit, the Biblical blood. The blood is the fire of the life ; yea, the life is the fire. Christ makes his fullest revelations to the glowing heart. When the heart is right the revelation comes quite easily. Until the heart is right the life can see nothing. Each heart has its own sign of the Lord's identity. How did they know it was the Lord ? They knew him in the breaking of bread. Blessed are they who know the Lord in common things. There are some who only know him in an elaborate

argumentation which neither they nor the reasoner can understand. Others know the Lord by the gift of a flower ; they see a daisy in the meadow, and they fall down and say, " Let us pray ! " That daisy is an altar. These men, simple-minded, warm-hearted, knew the Lord in the giving of bread. Behold, he sat at meat with them—not as the guest, but as the host ; " he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them"—just as he had done a little while before ; and they knew the habit of the Man, they knew what he had once done ; " And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight," and he was made known to them in the breaking of the supper bread. Do not eat atheistic bread ; do not sit at atheistic tables. Make every meal a sacrament ; expect every time thou dost break bread to see thy Lord, O thou who livest and movest and hast thy being in God.

What did the men do ? They went forth and told everybody they met. Did they require to be reasoned with and some one to say, " Now, dear sirs, you ought to consider whether you are called to the ministry, and you ought to think whether it might not be desirable that you should give up secular pursuits, and renounce all worldly prospects and advantages : the ministry is a matter of self-denial ; we have to abandon many pursuits we should like to have fulfilled : now, do consider ! Not they. "They rose up the same hour," though it was toward evening and the day was far spent, and over the eight miles they went, and said, " The Lord is risen indeed." Then they told the little story, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread. They would have required great arguments to keep them back. Our young souls require great arguments to persuade them to come forward. We have to get round them, and urge them, and entreat them,

and say to them, "Dear young friends, you will be conferring a great honour upon the Cross." Never! No man can honour the Cross. When that Cross is in you, you must go, you will go, and you who are just about to retire to rest because the day is nearly done will say, "The morning shineth," and away speed over hill and dale to tell all you know. Do not let the heart grow cold. Keep a warm heart. Everything depends upon the heart's truly spiritual heat. Oh, let anything go down but the heat of the heart ! The warm heart will keep you right. "Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life." Lord God the Holy Ghost, in this accepted hour, as on the day of Pentecost, come down to us, and make our hearts burn within us ! Amen.

## PRAYER.

LORD of heaven and earth, we bless thee that heaven and earth are always named together in thy Book. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; and Jesus said, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Do they not belong to one another? Would the heaven be happy without the earth? would the earth be lighted by one morning without the heavens? Teach us that we belong to one another, and we belong to God; give us the joy of fellowship, deliver us from the idea of self-completeness; give us to feel that all thou hast made is one. May we enter into the unity of things and consider ourselves in the light of others; may we hear the music of the upper world coming to us with every breeze. No man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself. The act is not in itself alone; it vibrates and throbs, and repeats itself in many a mysterious succession. Thus shall our lives be godly; thus shall we live the Christ-life. He saveth others, himself he did not save; he liveth for men and women and little children, and he made all the poor his friends, and sent the rich empty away as they came. We bless thee for this Son of man, God the Son, the Eternal Wonder, the Unspeakable Joy. He promised to give us rest if we would come to him: but how can we come? He promised to give us strength wherewith to come. So all things are of grace; all goodness grows in the garden of God; all tenderness is a flower of heaven. We bless thee, therefore, that though we can do nothing, we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. May we always await the incoming strength; may we know that we have no power of our own: when we know this we begin to learn true wisdom; our springs are in God. Help us to live our little life wisely, nobly, usefully to others. We shall so live if we live in thy Son, if we die in thy Son, if we rise again in thy Son; then shall our life be an evangel, our breath shall be a gospel amongst men. If any have heavy burdens to carry, give strength that they may be borne bravely; if any have to turn aside sometimes to shed tears in darkness, may they hear a voice in the cloud promising comfort, promising light; if any are

called to new experience of adversity, who have only seen poverty at a distance before, but now have to make a bedfellow of it, the Lord give strength to those whose nest has been torn in pieces, and whose one tree has been blown down by the rough wind ; if any are of aching heart, wondering how it is with the old man, with the gentle, grey-haired mother, with the wandering child gone out to fell trees in the forest, to clear a space that honest life may have a chance, the Lord heal such heartache, the Lord's balm be plentifully dispensed in the hour of need. The Lord knoweth us altogether : herein is our joy, and herein is sometimes our fear ; yet we will not fear, thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust, and thou dost not expect from death what thou dost expect from life : thou knowest we have yet to die. The Lord be with us in all time of suffering and of anxious thoughtfulness, and especially be with us when we are drinking copiously of the wine of joy, lest in our momentary intoxication we forget that Jesus alone can turn our water into wine. Amen.

## VII.

### THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

"We have seen strange things to-day."—LUKE v. 26.

**T**HIS exclamation appropriately follows every true view of the work of Christ, in the personal soul and in general history. Everything about Christianity is strange : it breaks up the commonplaces of history. If to-day we can read any part of the gospel narrative without surprise, it is because we have become indifferent through familiarity with the letter. Take the life of our Lord from his birth to his ascension, and the whole course is marked by wonder, surprise, amazement, sorrow, or unspeakable joy. Bethlehem had its unique wonder. The Sermon on the Mount was followed by the astonishment of all who heard its doctrine. Every miracle was followed by amazement. Even the personal habits of our Lord excited the wonder of friends and foes : "They wondered at the gracious

words that proceeded out of his mouth"; "They wondered that he spake unto the woman"; "They all murmured that he had gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner"; "They were amazed, saying one to another, What manner of man is this?" All these remarks point to the distinctiveness or uniqueness of the Man and his work. Loss of distinctiveness is loss of power. Not where Christianity is like other religions, but where it is unlike them, does it assert its real majesty and influence. It is the same with Christian conduct. "What do ye more than others?" The emphasis is upon the "more" as well as upon the "others." Christ is not satisfied that his disciples should do as much as others: in a broad and deep sense, they only become his disciples when they surpass all other conceptions of moralities. We are acquainted with the studies of comparative theology and comparative morals. If we would do justice to Christ, we must pass from the comparative to the contrastive. No moralist can do the same work as the Christian is called upon to do, though there may be a strong superficial similarity between the two services. It is not only the conduct of the Christian that is good: it is the underlying motive that has been sanctified by the Cross of Christ, under the power of the Eternal Spirit. In the judgment of Christ the value of every action is determined by motive. Hence the work of Jesus Christ is spiritual: it blesses the soul with pardon; it inspires the soul with unquenchable desire to do good to all men. Thus the morality of Jesus Christ is not an attitude in conduct, or a mere cleverness in the adoption of expedients: it is the expression of a renewed and sanctified condition of the soul.

Christianity itself, as a doctrine, is open to the challenge, What does Christianity more than other religions? Here,

again, we come upon the standard of "doing." Does Christianity answer more questions, cover more ground, supply more succour, invest the soul with larger faculty and freedom, than other religions? We are told that pagan religions were characterised by reverence, by discipline, and by elevating aspiration: possibly so; for my part, I believe that there is nothing good in any religion which is not the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. God has not left himself without witness in the land. Christianity does not repel the good features and actions of other religions, but it distinctly claims them as broken parts of its own integrity. Other religions are mere sentiments, speculations, expedients, or intellectual philosophies; but Christianity is a cross, a redemption, an atonement, a great specific offer of the loving heart of God to pardon the sin of the world. Other religions are local—they belong to specific races and to peculiar conditions of personal and social development: the religion of Jesus Christ is world-wide, and adapted to every member of the whole family of mankind. Christianity gives the whole world over to the charge of its believers. It binds those believers to make the Cross known in every language and under every sky. The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ will not allow men to be self-indulgent, to be narrowly patriotic, to be morally indifferent to the sin, the crime, the outrage, the poverty and suffering of the world. We can never consent, therefore, to look upon Christianity as one religion amongst many. Having tasted and handled the Word of Life, we hold it to be the one religion that can meet all the conditions of fallen human nature. This is the point of wonder. This is the reason for the loud and triumphant hallelujahs that go up to the Throne through the medium of the Cross.

The day of the Christ-vision is the most memorable day in the experience of the soul. Truly of that day a man may fitly exclaim, "I have seen strange things!" What are some of the things which he has seen which impress him as being strange? First, he has seen himself. No man can know himself through and through until he has seen the Son of God. Man has studied himself under broken lights and under partial conditions, but he cannot really see into his very soul until he has received the marvellous light of the Christ-presence. Men think they know themselves; but, as a matter of fact, they only see aspects of their nature, and hear the louder voices of their life: they do not see their nature as a whole, and hear the finer music which is breathing through all the mystery of spiritual being. Men comparing themselves with themselves become self-satisfied: not until they stand beside the stature and majesty of the only-begotten Son can they realise how far they fall short of the divine ideal. The first essential condition of spiritual progress is that a man should know himself, and this knowledge can only be obtained by a vision of Christ's infinite holiness.

In the next place, the man who has seen the Christ-vision sees a change in all standards of value. Those things that were gain to him, he counts but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord. Birth, wealth, fame, social importance, all dwindle into nothing before the standard of the Cross. Paul rejoices that he had suffered the loss of all things, and counted them less than nothingness that he might win Christ. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in the

Lord." Here, again, is a vital point of wonder. Strange that a man should think the whole world nothing in comparison with one Man—that one Man the Saviour that died for him.

In the third place, the man who has seen Christ is enabled to see the importance which attaches to every soul. Christianity raises up the poor out of the dunghill, and makes princes of men who were of no account. Of Christ it may be said, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." Souls that he despised before are now become important to the believer who has seen that Christ tasted death for every man. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted." In every little child see an emblem of the kingdom of heaven. Christianity will enable every believer to see in every human soul, how lowly soever its social condition, a child of God, and a possible inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Every Christmas morning the Christian may gratefully exclaim, "We have seen strange things to-day!" There is a new song in the air; there is a new light on all the spaces of life; there is a new hope in the heart. Christmas brings us the Babe that saves the world. At Christmas we enter into the joy of having ourselves become babes in Christ Jesus. He keeps truly the season of the Nativity who feels that Christ has been born in him the hope of glory. Every heart must be the Bethlehem in which Christ is born. Has he been born in ours? Is he cradled in our love? Is he the Child that makes all other children as angels? Every Easter the Christian may exclaim, "We have seen strange things to-day!" We have seen the tomb opened; we have seen death vanquished; we have the incoming of a glorious Immortality. Do not

let us think of the resurrection of Christ as having been accomplished at a merely historical point of time: let us rather think of it as the light of every Sabbath morning. The true history is not an accident or an event of a moment; its spirit runs through all time, and gives new significance to all events. At Easter-tide we feel as if within the social warmth and glory of a birthday, but we must never forget that the birth begun on one Easter-tide reaches through all the intervening days until the following Easter-tide shall dawn. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. iii. 1). The seeking of those things will keep us alive in the Spirit from one birthday to another. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 11). Every Ascension-day Christians may exclaim, "We have seen strange things to-day!" We have seen our blessed Lord enter into a cloud and passing away to his mediatorial throne. "While he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke xxiv. 51). So it shall be with all Christians. They may here and now enter into the spirit of their Lord's ascension. "Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth." This is the true ascension—the rising up of the soul that it may take possession of heavenly places, and live in the fear and love of God. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Never let us think of our own ascension as having to take place at the expiration of unknown years; it may take place now, it should take place every day, for our life is hid with Christ in God. "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold,

all things are become new." That great and strange things are to happen, in the order of divine providence, to individual souls and to the united Church, is perfectly clear to all who receive the Cross with a humble and obedient heart; but I am guarding against the possibility of deferred enjoyment, whilst we might even now feel that our affections and interests are essentially in heaven. When Christ shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; but even now we may grow into the spiritual beauty of our Lord. "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." When the season of Pentecost returns, Christians may exclaim, "We have seen strange things to-day!" At Pentecost the Holy Ghost was poured out in all the plenitude of his power: "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." As with the Nativity and with Easter-tide and with Ascension-day, so with blessed Pentecost. We may have Pentecost in all its highest spiritual signification day by day. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." "Covet earnestly the best gifts." The Spirit is the gift of God. We are living in the dispensation of the Spirit, and should not be satisfied until we are filled with all the fulness of his light and love.

If we would escape the wonders of judgment, we must accept the wonders of redemption. All the wonders of God are not mere surprises; they are warnings, or benedictions, or signs of love. God does not want to astonish us by his power; he would rather astonish us by his compassion. It is not enough to receive the visions of God with natural wonder, or even with admiring applause. Many men admire who do not obey. There is an intellectual surprise which perishes in its own vapid expression. Our Lord

would have us live under the inspiration and comfort of that grateful surprise which expresses its sacred delight in endeavouring to bring every man to see the same glory, and to warm into fruitfulness under the warmth of the same summer.

## VIII.

### APOSTOLIC POLICY.

"I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."—*1 COR. ii. 2.*

MANY delightful discourses have been preached upon this text which have been totally irrelevant to the real meaning which the Apostle sought to convey. The idea is not that of absorption in one particular theme which excludes all other themes. The Apostle does not represent himself as a contemplatist or hermit or a man of one idea. It has generally been thought that the Apostle would entertain no other subject but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified"; he would take no interest in weather or politics or social conditions or public welfare. Morning, noon, and night he would speak upon one subject only, and that subject, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." We must get rid of this reading of the text, and express the idea precisely as it existed in the Apostle's mind. In effect, Paul said, "Brethren, when I thought of coming to Corinth I had distinctly before my mind your controversies and mutual hostilities, your murmurings and disputings; but concerning these I formed no opinion whatever. The evidence was not before me; the parties could not explain or defend themselves,—so I kept an open mind as to the entire situation. In fact, I determined nothing except 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified'; that was my one point of

fixity ; no change could possibly take place there ; but that is the only thing I did determine, rescrvng all else for consideration and decision after I had heard the evidence and seen the parties." That was the state of the apostolic mind, from which it will appear that the one determination to which Paul had come did not *exclude* any subject, but *regulated* everything else—in other words, it put everything else into its right perspective and proportion. The Apostle was not stating a doctrine, but indicating a policy—a policy to which he was steadfast throughout the whole course of his ministry. A judge ascending the bench has not formed any opinion as to the cases which are to come before him ; his policy is to hear the evidence, to see the witnesses, to consider the examination and the cross-examination, and then to give judgment on the whole case. It is the business of a judge to keep an open mind. The judge has determined only one thing, which is, that the law shall be administered and justice shall be done. That was precisely the policy of the Apostle Paul in view of his visit to the church at Corinth. One thing he did determine. We must follow his example. In all great subjects there is one point of fixity, and by that point we must judge all the varying conditions of thought and opinion. Apply this policy to the whole range of Christian thinking and service, and the happy result will be deep and permanent peace.

Let us illustrate this in a case or two. For example, there is the case of Biblical inspiration connected with the whole apparatus and purpose of what is known as the Higher Criticism. As to this matter I have determined only one thing, but that one thing keeps me right in relation to all other things. The thing I have determined is, That the heart of God has spoken to the heart of man. Regarding that point my mind cannot be changed.

Questions of criticism come and go, but that holy conviction abides, deepens, rises into rapturous appreciation and thankfulness. So far as the Bible is literature it must defend itself in the court of enlightened and fearless criticism. But it must never be forgotten that the Bible is more than literature: it is a spiritual revelation to the spirit of man. Within that scope criticism has no place. Criticism deals with words, the relation of words, the changing aspects and value of words, but it cannot deal with the mysterious aspirations, sympathies, and affinities of the soul. Experts alone can handle questions of pure scholarship. But the influence of the Bible is not confined to experts. It utters a great voice to the common heart of humanity, and by that voice the common heart will judge it. The common heart cannot reconcile discrepancies, or bring into harmony chronological tables, or settle authorships and dates; in all that region sanctified scholarship must do its own peculiar work, and the Church must be thankful for its service, whatever verbal havoc or rearrangement may follow its operations. But the revelation remains; the divine heart speaks to the human heart; a great sufficiency addresses a painful necessity; and holy voices of the past address themselves to the consciousness of the world. Here, then, is my resting-place. I have determined only one thing, and that one thing regulates every other thing, and thus my soul is at rest. A literal Bible could be stolen, but a spiritual revelation is laid by where thieves cannot break through nor steal. Take your stand upon this firm ground, and no man can take from you the infinite treasure of a direct revelation of the heart of God to the sin and pain, the aspiration and the hope, of your own heart.

Apply the same noble policy to the subject of prayer.

Is prayer answered? Beyond all doubt. Prayer is not only answered, it must be answered, for it belongs to that sequence of necessities which stand in close relation to the sovereignty of God. There is only one prayer, though there are many statements, many pleas, many sordid desires, many short-sighted petitions. What is that one prayer? It is the Lord's Prayer. The set of petitions and adorations which go by the name of the Lord's Prayer are really not the Lord's Prayer at all, though bearing that ecclesiastical designation. The so-called Lord's Prayer was not prayed by Jesus Christ; it was simply given as a form to the disciple: "When ye pray, say." It was a prayer taught by the Lord, but not offered by him. Jesus needed not to pray, "Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive them that trespass against me." What, then, is the Lord's Prayer? It was the prayer offered by our Lord during his agony in the garden. In that prayer he first expressed his own desire, which was not prayer; then he gave up his own desire and resigned himself to the will of God. When the Saviour said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," he prayed, and that prayer was answered. When we fast and pray that the dying child may be spared to us, we have not reached the sublimity or the pathos of prayer. We are on our way, it may be, to that high issue, but we have not attained. When we rise to higher ground and say from the heart, "Father, if it be possible, spare the little life, ruin not the light and joy of our house, 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done,'" the tender prayer, the mighty prayer, the only lawful prayer, and the surely prevalent, begins at the word "Nevertheless." Of course there is an obvious inquiry to the effect that if the will of God must be done, what need is there for prayer? The answer is as obvious as the inquiry. The

will of God may be done in either of two ways—first, either against your consent; or, second, with it. Prayer makes all the difference between these opposing conditions. God's will cannot be thwarted, for it must be done, crush what it may; but God's will can be piously and lovingly accepted, and then there is blessedness in the very wreck of our expectations and desires. If the stone fall upon us it will grind us to powder; if, on the contrary, we fall upon the stone we shall be broken, and after the breaking we shall be reconstructed according to the divine purpose. Prayer, then, is always answered, for the divine will is always ultimately done. God does not forbid us to state our case, to plead before him, to talk according to our degree of intelligence, but he does require us at the end of all our pleading to remit the whole case to his own will, which must be right, seeing that he is Creator and Father and Sovereign of all. Never pray without the "Nevertheless." Pour out your hearts in all their selfishness and ignorance, and plead the whole case, even with an agony of earnestness, and having done so, say, though with a great sob of the heart, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"; then tell me whether prayer be not followed by the answer of an infinite peace.

The Apostle gives another illustration of what may be called his points of fixity when he says, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The word "rule" in this particular sense occurs nowhere else in Scripture. It literally means, Let the peace of God be your arbitrator, your referee, your umpire. The figure is that of a contested game, all questions being remitted to the decision of the arbitrator or umpire; his word is final. So we are to bring all our contentions, perplexities, and self-contradic-

tions into the court of the divine peace, and whatever is contrary to the spirit of that peace must be cast out, denounced, and destroyed, though it be precious as a right hand or sacred as a right eye. This is another development of the apostolic policy. The Apostle's determination is that nothing shall be done to disturb the dove of the divine peace. Take all your bargains, enterprises, schemes, policies, temptations, and seductions into the court presided over by the Peace of God, and if that peace would be even fluttered by your pursuit or acceptance of one of these things, you must abide by the word of the umpire, though you suffer the loss of all things. Do not indulge in casuistry ; do not turn lies into promises, as you would do were you to imagine that you could make a good use of wealth ill-gotten ; do not grieve the Spirit of peace ; do not quench the Spirit of peace,—if that peace would be so much as fluttered by your acceptance of any course of conduct, you may surely know by that sign that the will of God is against you. God has not left questions of right and wrong to be decided by changing circumstances ; he has put into the heart a divine spirit, even the spirit of his own peace, and by that spirit the Christian is to determine everything which affects his life and its service.

Here, then, we have the apostolic policy variously illustrated ; that policy may be summed up in one word. Let the vital point in every case be fixed beyond the possibility of modification or change, and let that vital point determine everything which comes up for judgment and decision. If you are not steadfast at one point, and that point truly vital, you will be driven about by every wind of doctrine, tossed to and fro, the victim and the sport of instability, and let the double-minded man know

that he can receive nothing of the Lord. We need not be one in our opinions or in our verbal creeds, but we must be one in our spiritual faith. We are saved by faith, not by opinion ; by faith that is of God, not by creeds made of man. If we have faith we have salvation. Faith is not a merely intellectual assent to propositions or dogma ; it is the very life and substance of the soul.

## PRAYER.

WE have come to worship thee, living Father, and to pour out our praise in thine ear. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Our gladness will not be dumb ; we must make our voices heard in the courts of the Lord. Thou hast beset us behind and before, and laid thine hand upon us. Thou hast kept our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, and our soul from death. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us ? We would draw our breath in the fear of the Lord ; we would live in the higher air, in the spiritual atmosphere, untainted by any pestilence of time. Oh, that we might be so holy that our breath would be a benediction, that every inhalation would be a renewed token of thy presence and thy grace in the soul ! To this high refinement do thou educate us by the mighty power and ineffable tenderness of the Holy Ghost. We would live and move and have our being in God : we would pass by all that is human and social and perishable, and rest our souls in the sanctuary of thy presence. Thou didst teach us this prayer,—it is verily the Lord's prayer,—and thou wilt not deny thine own petitions, thou will not resent thine own inspirations ; having taught us to pray, thou wilt make us rich with great answers. We have come to commune with thee, as it were, in friendliness and filial honour and homage, for thou hast been bountiful to us with an infinite largeness. We have nothing that we have not received. We made nothing, we take all things from thine own hands. We have nothing that is our own, we ourselves are not our own : thou didst make us, and thou didst redeem us with the precious blood of Christ : we are wholly thine. If thou wilt work in us this sweet assurance, we shall be always glad with peace, and always calm with faith that cannot be disturbed. Only give us sight of thy face, give our hearts daily vision of thy love : then though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, we shall sing of thy river, quiet and deep as thine own love. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we are ashamed of our transgression ; we have broken thy commandment, and we have grieved thy love. What shall we do ? Nothing we can do will be of

avail; but thou hast met us, come after us, searched us out: thou hast died for us, thou hast bought us with a price. We come, therefore, to thee through Jesus, Son of man, Son of God: with him is acceptance; in him is reconciliation; with him is the peace of God. We come by the blood-way, we come by the path of the Cross, we seek Thee over Calvary: amid its shadows we shall find the glory, in its night we shall see the true day. We pray for one another; we love one another, we belong to one another; we are one in Christ Jesus, Lamb of God, Son of man—man, woman, Saviour, mystery of being, and mystery of love. Where there is weariness, do thou give rest; where there is perplexity, thou canst disentangle all the knotted threads, thou canst show the right road amid all the paths. May each hear a voice in his ear, saying, "This is the way, walk in it"; and at the end of that way we shall find heaven, and on the roadside a thousand flowers. Guide us during the few hours of our lives that remain. Our days are but a handful at the best; they are as a weaver's shuttle fleeing to and fro, and as shadow-clouds driven by the sharp wind. And bring us all,—the prodigal, the outcast, the wanderer, together with the sweet old hearts that make home all it is,—bring us all into the land of sunshine, the land of holy peace. Amen.

## IX.

### BACK TO GOD.

"But from the beginning of the creation God."—MARK x. 6.

THAT is what we want to get at. We are perplexed, divided, and confused by things intermediate and transient. We have had enough of them. We want to get back to the beginning, back to the divine intent—back behind the beginning, back into the council-chamber of the Eternal. The context is graphic and beautiful. The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" They tempted the Teacher; they were inwardly mocking him, and secretly endeavouring to entrap him. "And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?"

You profess to be devoted to the law of Moses, how does that law read upon the question which you have put to me? "And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorce, and to put her away." Jesus answered: So far, so good; you are scholars of the letter, very poor scholars, or you would have known that "For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept"—something to be going on with, a piece of paper you can handle and use under limited circumstances. "But from the beginning of the creation God." He did not stop at Moses or the prophets. This Teacher, as prophesied by Isaiah, drew his breath in the fear of God. He was not the disciple of any man: he brought messages directly from the mind and heart of God. We feel, therefore, that we are in company with the right Teacher now. Moses accommodated himself to the hardness of your heart; "but from the beginning of the creation God" made two, man and wife, one: whom, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!

Thus all the little card-box legislation of all the great teachers that ever invented new schemes of society—all these inventions, suggestions, legislations—are rolled over by this Man whose breath was drawn in the fear of God, and who spake from the steps of the palace of the Eternal. That is what we want to get at. Not what Moses said, not what the Greeks philosophised, not what the Spartans turned into discipline; all this is more or less dignified gossip and conjecture—foolish, or useful for the moment. What we want to get at is God—what he meant when he said, "Let us make." If I could convey this thought to you as it is in my own mind, you would be inspired souls, you would take a new view of society and all its arrangements and divers trumperies.

In the context we are face to face with Moses and Christ. Moses, for the hardness of the hearts of the people, made a certain temporary arrangement, but it was aside from the eternal thought ; permissible, but not perpetual. So we need minor providences—little bye-laws, small schedules, parliamentary enactments, things to be going on with—to restrain the wanton and the wilful ; but all these are playthings comparatively. If we could get back to “the beginning of the creation,” and, like Christ, draw our breath in the fear of God, legislation itself would be natural breathing, Socialism would be deepest and truest life : “Behold, I make all things new.” It is in the nature of a fallen curiosity and debased ingenuity to be making more wordy laws. Jesus Christ brought laws to a minimum. He said, All that the prophets and the law have been trying to say may be summed up in two words : “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Any society that is rich in schedules and bye-laws and subtle arrangements and difficult interpretations of the law is in a bad way. This is the condition of society to-day : the lawmakers divided, the bench cleft in two. We want to hear the sweet woman-voice of the Man who calls us away from all these things into fellowship with God, union with the Spirit, oneness with the eternal right. Every bolt on your door is a witness against society ; every time you turn the key and lock a drawer, you indict human nature. Society is organised scepticism.

What we want to get at, then, is the divine thought, the divine intention “from the beginning of the creation.” From the beginning of the creation what was man’s personal relation to God ? He was the under-god, the companion-god, the visible god, a partaker of the divine

nature. What is man now according to our Catechism? A fallen and depraved being. True. "But from the beginning of the creation God" made man in his own image and his own likeness. We are not to be stopped by the law of Moses or by the catechism of theology; we must get back to God's own purpose in setting up man, to whom he could speak, and with whom he could hold communion of heart. How do you describe man? Small, few in days, his breath is in his nostrils, there is none abiding; one dieth in his full strength, another dieth in his youth and never eateth with pleasure; the earth is a graveyard; man is a sinner; man is of small account, he is as a wind that cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away.

Quite right up to a given point; but remember, "in the beginning of the creation God" made man in his own image and in his own likeness—made man immortal, gave him what is called an immortal soul; the soul being the true self. We must get back to that divine standard if we would set a right value upon any human creature that has debased humanity and brought discredit upon the very earth he treads. At present we are looking into reports, into the reports of royal commissions, forsooth! into reports of committees and councils, into examinations and cross-examinations; and we are basing our judgment of mankind or of society upon such reports. We have had enough. The reports are perfectly correct; the reports are useful within given limits; we cannot conduct society as it is at present, debased and degraded, without the assistance of such reports; "but at the beginning of the creation God" made man upright. When you hear of man, you ought to hear of uprightness; but "they have sought out many inventions," and the proudest of their

"inventions" is a falsehood. There is great difficulty in some quarters as to the immortality of the soul. If you start the discussion of the immortality of man from a period after his historical apostasy, you will be wrong ; starting from the wrong point, you will come to a false conclusion. What you must do is to get back to "the beginning of the creation." What did God make man when he made him in his own image ?—a thing of clay, a thing that could be rusted by time, a thing that would be the sport of the centuries ? Never ! He made him immortal : the breath that warmed his nostrils came from the mouth of God.

What was man's relation to man "from the beginning of the creation"? Man was man's "keeper." A sweet thought—a divine socialism!—the socialism that is utterly forgotten to-day amid a thousand pamphlets that are snowed into the gutter. This man hath a dream, and that man a prophecy, concerning altruism, and another man hath a proposition to make. These may be good, they may suit a certain period of time and a certain definition of territory, they may be exceedingly useful within a limited period ; "but from the beginning of the creation God"! That is what we want to know. God said, "Where is thy brother ?"

This is not a doctrine that can be taught by pamphlets ; this is not the issue of some very learned dissertation read before some very somnolent audience : this belongs to the "beginning" of things, this is the *à priori* condition. We thus get back and back to God's thought : no reformation can ever take the place of regeneration ; no socialism can ever overtake the divine idea of man filled with solicitude about man, not happy until the other man is found, not at rest whilst there is one poor little drenched creature wandering about in the wilderness of the midnight.

Not a mechanical law. God has no poor-law. We, being made in his image and likeness, should love one another, not by commandment of the letter, but by commandment of the Spirit, by the pressure of an infinite and ineffable necessity—the rush of God upon all the springs and motions of the soul. Man hath sought out many inventions : he tinkers and patches ; he legislates and amends and enlarges and undoes ; he is, before God, a fool ! He doth not hold large commerce with God. When the spirit is right, all literal schedules may be discarded. We shall not be right until we cannot help doing good—until we breathe it, until we are transformed by it. That is the divine idea. God is love. He does not legislate himself into a momentary and evanescent affection ; in his soul he is love : that is how he made man at “the beginning of the creation.”

At the beginning of the creation what was man's relation to the lower animals ? Providential, divine, priestly, educative. There were no wild beasts until there were wild men. We do not heed this. You might have had the wolf on your hearthstone as a gentle, trusting creature. You might have had the nightingale perched on your shoulder, singing you songs of heaven in the dark night. The dog meant and wanted to love you more : you are the dog's god ; when his god fell, he became savage. Oh, foolish souls ! There is a time coming when the Saviour of the seven spirits, the Prince of the four names, shall rule the earth, and then the wolf shall dwell with the lamb the little child shall play at the den of the cockatrice, and there shall be none to hurt or to destroy in my mountain ; for it is holy. The man that would civilise by destruction is a poor man ; he takes the very meanest, vulgarest way of making gardens. Being fallen, he must needs have a

gun ; having made of himself a savage, he must go into the jungle and shoot the noblest beasts that the divine hand ever formed ; being himself dehumanised, he must be cruel to his own dog, to his own horse, ay, sometimes to his own children !

When the Lord made all the animals to pass before man that he might name them, it means in the deepest spiritual significance that he might hug them, pet them, endear himself to them, so that the voice of man should be the voice of domination, not in the sense of fear, but in a very subtle sense of acquiescence. God gave man all the animals on the earth, in the air, whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea ; yet man has gone to the devil's side, and wants to civilise by pitiless extirpation. The poor fool has now no remedy but to destroy the aborigines ! He would shoot down the blacks ; he would evangelise them by laceration. And as for the beasts of the field, he makes weapons on purpose for their destruction, and traps for the purpose of catching them, that he may wound and disable and destroy. "At the beginning of the creation" God meant all the animals to be gentle, beautiful, serviceable, co-operative ; but now the little bird, the little redbreast, the little lark, is afraid when man, who should be to him as god and providence and priest, comes near. That is our reputation ! To that we have brought things ! The very birds are frightened of us.

In the beginning of the creation what was man's relation to productive nature ? God gave him all the green things, all the trees, all the herbs ; they should be to man for seed and for fruit ; and when man tilled the ground, it should laugh in bountifulness of harvest. All the seasons were handed over to man ; all nature was to be as man's

providing mother ; she should say to him, "I am now ready, gather me into the garner, because winter snows are coming ; here is thy bread ; here is the anticipative answer to all thy winter's necessities." Man has spoiled the harvest ; the earth does not hear him. From the beginning of the creation God meant that the earth was to hear the heavens, and the heavens were to hear himself, and there was to be a great interplay of ministry and action ; the result being that man was to be knee-deep in flowers, and to have bread enough all the winter long. That was the divine idea "from the beginning of the creation" ; that idea is yet to be realised in gospel times. There is a specific pledge or promise to this effect : "Let the people praise, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee ; then shall the earth yield her increase." But man, foolish man, undertakes the agricultural question ; the nation appoints a Minister of Agriculture !

Was there ever such a living haystack found on all the meadows of time ? The agricultural question is pressed upon the attention of Parliament. That may be necessary just now—man may have brought himself into that condition ; but the only ultimate and lasting way out of it is to get back "to the beginning of the creation," the divine idea : and when the people praise God, and all the people praise him, a choir large as humanity, an orchestra large as creation, then shall the earth yield her increase, and all garners will be poor to accommodate God's infinite reply.

This is the reason the Church exists ; this is the reason that a religious ministry must be kept up. We must get man back to the *à priori* position, to the divine notion, to what God himself meant when he made man and

constructed society. I know that this will get rid of all our intermediaries, all our social ameliorations, all our second causes, all our patchings and tinkerings. Men now read essays upon the poverty of the age—and print them—and forget them; in divers ways they beat the air and take the darkness home. It is very pitiful, but it looks legislative, inventive, clever. Now we are boastfully bringing to bear upon the poverty, the necessity, and the bad condition of society “a statesman-like capacity.” O my Father, pity us! Thou didst make us upright, and we have made ourselves “statesmen”! It will be very old-fashioned doctrine, and very unacceptable to the young and budding genius of the century, when I say that we must get back to prayer, in its real, true, deep, eternal signification, before we can get back to any real prosperity. From the beginning of the creation God provided for sin. Sin is no surprise to Omniscience: the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world; before the sin was done the atonement was rendered. Alas! we make our little plans and our infinite mistakes, and then we say we are as God made us. That is the chief of lies. When you made that statement, that you are as God made you, you told all lies in one black falsehood. Here is the foundation of the Evangelical ministry, here is the beginning of the divine regeneration. Men take all things into their own hand, and, having wrought out the problem, as they would call it, into all manner of confusion and disappointment, they say, “Where is Providence?” You should have asked that question ages ago; you should have got into a right relation to Providence before you made your first mistake. That which is bad from the beginning can never, saith the Roman law, be made right by any lapse of time. We are wrong at the start, we are wrong

fundamentally, and no resolution-mongering will ever be permitted to usurp the throne of the Eternal and to direct the centuries in their moral and spiritual legislation. Back to prayer, to faith, to yourself, as God meant you to be !

The great lesson is to get back to God, get back to "the beginning of the creation." The cry of the day is, "Get back to Christ!" That was never Christ's own cry ; his cry was, "Back to the Father, back to God!" We go to Christ that we may get to the Father ; we go to the atoning Christ that we may pass on to the pardoning God. Then cometh the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and his Father, and God shall be all in all. It is a weary way, to hang ourselves on the trees of our own invention. We make suicides of ourselves (notwithstanding the verbal paradox) every day we live ; for we will not have God to reign over us.

That is, suggestively, without any attempt at exhaustive elaboration, how the case stands ; and until we all get back to fundamental conceptions, and to a realisation of the divine intention, we shall be only making new plans in order to discard them ; for man's inventions are shorter-lived than himself. Here is the great call to young preachers, to missionaries of the Cross, to Christian leaders of society. I know you have your altruism and your socialism, and your schemes for making yourselves longer holidays ; I know you have your battlings and your strikes and your lock-outs and your various social confusions and misunderstandings : but unless the Lord hath forsaken my soul, and left that soul as an empty tenement, I will say that the only way out of all personal sin and social

trouble is by getting back to the divine intention in the making of men and in the construction of society. Who can give us the information and the wisdom that we need ? Jesus Christ. He dwelt in the bosom of the Father ; he draws his breath in the fear of the Lord. Get audience of him, and he will show you how to build your house upon a rock.

## PRAYER.

WE come to thee, thou living Christ: thou ever livest to make intercession for us. Thy name is Life, thy gift is life; thou didst come that we might have life, and that we might have it more and more—wave upon wave, like a rising tide. Thou dost feed us with thy life: Because I live, ye shall live also, is thy sweet word of love and hope. We build upon it—we have no other wealth: it is enough; all things are thus made ours. Thou hast associated thyself with our little life. We cannot tell what thou wilt make of it: thou hast eternity to work in; but thou wilt make us lovely with thine own pureness, and in our lifting up there shall be somewhat of thine own majesty. The way is long, hard—sometimes hot, sometimes cold; for in thy year there is both summer and winter. Thou hast set them there with their varied lessons: may we receive thy providence as a gift of thy love. Not our way, but thy way, would we go home; not our will, but thy will, be done. If it be a will of fire and piercing and loss and humiliation, behold, our hearts sink within us, because we are only men; but if it be otherwise, and if thus thou dost make thy grace known to us in all its fulness and power, glory and honour be unto thy name, thou living, reigning Christ. Our earth which thou hast given us, just enough to stand on and find a grave in, is so small, and thy stars are so many: thy heavens lie all unmeasured. We are sometimes overpowered, and we dread to look up; for who can bear the glory of thy sky? But there thou art working out what we cannot see now; these are the many mansions in the Father's house; it is enough that thou reignest, and that all things lie within the palm of thy wounded hand. We thank thee for all thy love; we thank thee for the little grave, and the large grave: we are proud of our dead. They cannot fall, they cannot sin; death hath no more dominion over them, and hell is disappointed. Oh, that we too may so live that we shall join the white-robed angels and saints far away above the clouds, and know how true it is that abounding sin is nothing compared with abounding grace! Thou hast always kept life uppermost; there has always been more life than death in thy

universe, more heaven than hell, more good souls than bad ones : didst thou not choose twelve men, and only one was a devil ? Behold, thou wilt make all things new, and thou wilt work up the refuse of life and history into some unimagined beauty. We give one another to thy tender, unchanging care. Pity us in our littleness and infirmity ; thou knowest how frail we are,—a bruised reed, only like a tuft of smoking flax, the last spark almost gone,—yet thou wilt recover us, and redeem us, and strengthen us, and we shall be partakers of thy holiness and thy power. Thou knowest all hearts : abide with each. Comfort all that mourn ; there is room on thy breast, thou living Christ, for us all to lay our sad hearts upon, and there is grace enough in thy love to feed and help and cheer and bless us every one. The Lord hear us when we cry ; sanctify our very sorrows, make our losses the beginning of our true wealth, and work in us such a conception of time and eternity that we shall hold in contempt all that this earth would give us to seduce us from the way of God. Wash us, cleanse us in thy blood. Oh, take our sin away, and make us men—pure, wise, strong, consecrated ; and so bring us to death that we shall not know it when we see it ! Amen.

## X.

## THE LIVING CHRIST.

“One Jesus whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”—ACTS xxv. 19.

“ONE Jesus—I know nothing of him. You may know the name—you are in some sort a Jewish king, Agrippa ; but I, Festus, a Roman, can only quote the name, and I am not quite sure that I pronounce it aright. But the discussion was about ‘one Jesus’ : some said he was dead ; Paul affirmed that he was alive. I could make nothing of the accusation ; I am a Roman : to me these questions are (I do not speak offensively in the presence of your majesty) local superstitions. I thought Paul was going to be accused of something in the ordinary way of crime, but they brought none accusation of such things

as I supposed when I got them face to face ; but they had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and especially of one Jesus ; over and over again that name came up. Some said he was dead, Paul affirmed that he was alive ; and so perplexed was I that I was glad the man had determined to go to the Augustus. I was thankful that he had made his appeal. I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem and be there judged of these Jewish matters—pardon me if I use the word ‘Jewish’ —but he resolved to appeal to the highest court, and, indeed, I am thankful to get him out of my hands.”

How curiously things present themselves to different minds ! We now in these Christian days say “Jesus,” and think we are speaking our mother tongue ; but Festus said, “one Jesus—pedlar, hawker, vagabond, adventurer, dreamer, fanatic, enthusiast ; I do not know what he was, but his name, if I recollect aright, was Jesus. There may be a thousand men of that name, for anything I know ; but this was a special Jesus, and the controversy was whether he was dead or alive. Paul, my prisoner, affirmed that he was alive.” There is nothing else to affirm. The Church stands or falls by this one affirmation. If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain—an empty thing, a wind that brings no music. “Was dead.” Certainly ; that is secular history. The man who drove the nails into his hands will tell you that ; the fiend that bathed his spear in his side would tell you that he was dead, and perhaps add, with a chuckle of triumph, that he killed him. The Church has nothing to do with the dead Christ ; that fact is also affirmed. The one fact is necessary to the other. Without the death there could be no resurrection ; but now we come to spiritual history, which carries the Saviour to the cross,

into the grave, out of the grave, and takes that resurrection leap which lands in heaven. That is the Church's position. Does the Church now ever preach upon the resurrection of Christ? There is a present Saviour, a living Saviour, an eternal Saviour. But "eternal" is a term which stretches backward as well as forward. Nothing that began can ever become eternal. It is no older than its own birthday; if it can be reckoned at either end, it ceases to be eternal. Christ never professed to be born, in the sense in which we ourselves are born; that is to say, with a conscious beginning in time and on earth. When Jesus Christ talked about himself, he spoke of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was; when the apostle described Christ's personality and being and ministry, he said, "All things were made by him." The maker is older than the thing made. Jesus Christ said, "I proceeded forth and came from God"; the apostle said, "In the beginning was the Word." Criticism has done much: it has been learned in grammar, it has quite a genius for conjugations—it makes them; but criticism has never laid its measuring-line upon the date of eternity, or on the space which, for want of a better word, we dimly and feebly describe as infinity. The Christ was only "alive" because he was never dead, except in the little, accidental, parenthetic manner of death, as killing with nails and spear, and laid a day or two in the tomb. But he was not dead; he shook it off him and went abroad into his own eternity, carrying not the death, but the life.

Paul, then, had a great affirmation to make. He no sooner began to preach than he preached upon the greatest themes. Jesus Christ began to preach "Repent!" Great preachers begin with great themes. We poor little minor preachers are thankful for some anecdote we can spiritu-

alise ; but when Jesus began to preach, he began to tear the world in pieces, and to put it together, showing that repentance is the gate which falls back on forgiveness. And when Paul began to preach, he reasoned out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ had risen from the dead. A Church without a great doctrine is only a piece of organisation or concealed ritualism. A Church must have some grand spiritual conception to keep it together, and keep it at work, and feed its inspiration. A Church without a fact is a house without a foundation. But who dare now preach on the resurrection? We have carried idealisation so far that we are not unwilling to hear that Christ rose just as any great man rises in posthumous influence. It is good to have amongst us a strong, brawny, robust believer, who, seizing us in our frivolous, but poetical and highly coloured, realities, turns round upon us with a face of flame and says, "Christ is alive!" In his confidence we restore our faith. He has a right to speak. Only one man was more wounded than Paul, and that was Paul's Lord. On back, on breast, on head, on hands, on feet, he bore the brand of the Lord Jesus ; he was an old-young man because of the sorrow he bore for Christ. When he turns that marred face upon us, it glows in every wrinkle and furrow as he says, "He is alive" ; and I would not be bold enough and fool enough to contradict a voice which is the articulation of such agony of experience. You will never build a great, strong, healthy, useful Church on speculation, dream, and mere sentiment of words. Something must have been done, and something must have been done whose meaning grows upon the growing centuries. Shall we say, "Something must have been planted"? The symbolism of Christianity and Christian truth admits of all manner of variation ; it requires

multitudinousness of metaphor to undertake all the fruitfulness of its significance. Let us then say, "Something must have been planted"; it grows, widens, heightens, fructifies; and when the centuries are a million thick around it, still it grows, as somehow the loaf must grow as the children come.

Who were the people that said that Jesus was dead? They are called "accusers." No name is given. If the accusations were not anonymous, they were official—"the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him." They were a body of energetic officials. Against them was pitted one man; his name, Paul; and he affirmed that Christ was alive. That Paul was an army; the stroke was the blow of a battering-ram. Demetrius came and said, "Silver-smiths, gentlemen, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands." Paul associated young comrades with him, but greatly to their overshadowing and extinction; but the men who spoke of Paul never spoke of him as a company, as one of many, but "Paul"—this Paul, this one man, this concentrated host. The Church needs individuality as much as doctrine. Doctrine may be very great; but if it be not uttered, exemplified, and glorified by strong, passionate, invincible personality, even a newspaper may get ahead of it. A live Christ should mean a live Church.

Very wonderful is it that Jesus Christ is always self-revealed; that is to say, the action always begins on his side, as an act of construction and supply. The action on the other side is an action of conscious deficiency and painful need, a kind of dumb prayer groping about the gates of heaven, and not knowing how to make itself

fittly known. Jesus Christ is self-revealed, we say. Take the case of the poor woman who was early at the grave, but not early enough. No man can ever be sufficiently early to catch Jesus Christ dead ; he is gone before the whitening of the east. Said the woman to some strange figure, humbled for the nonce into a gardener's guise, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him." And the figure changed itself like a planet escaped from an eclipse, and said, "Mary" ; and she knew him : and Love needs no exhortation to throw its arms around its idol. That was an act of self-revealing. And two men were walking, quite as sadly as Mary was herself affected, in the garden ; and they said, "We carry home with us in these cold hearts a dead trust, a shrouded, perished faith not worth embalming—let it rot" ; and the Man said, "What ! let your faith die ! Why, tell me your sorrow." And, as the story proceeds, we find at a certain point, in the gloaming, the shades almost night, that some Man broke bread, and in the breaking of it revealed himself, and vanished. It was his action, not the action of the men. In one instance it would seem as if a disciple had been the first to identify the Master, but not necessarily so. There was a Figure on the shore, and John said, "It is the Lord" ; but who knows what gleam there went from his face, what spark of fire from his fingers, what look of heaven shone in his whole attitude ? No ; Christ is self-revealed. He says, "I will tell Mary ; I will tell these two Emmaus travellers ; I will tell John, by sign that he cannot mistake, who I am."

But only those who want to know Christ can ever receive the revelation. Do you know Christ ? If you say No, then I tell you you don't want to know him. You may want to know him in some kind of intellectual

way, as a mere trick of mental curiosity or speculative solicitude, but your soul does not cry out for the living God. That is the reason you are a dead man—dead though Christ lives. Mary wanted to know ; she said in every attitude and in every tone, “ Oh that I knew where he is ! Sir, if thou canst tell me, make haste ! ” It is to such want that Christ comes as the sun comes to flowers that droop because they need his smile. The two disciples wanted to know ; John on the sea wanted to know. The law of Christ is that he will come wherever he is wanted—really, vitally, earnestly, agonisingly wanted. Do not try to find some metaphysical reason why you are not a Christian ; your heart has never felt the pang of the Christ-hunger. This is the law to-day and for ever ; hear the sweet Saviour, “ If any man open the door ” Lord, must it be opened from the inside ? “ Yes.” What is thine attitude ? “ Behold, I stand at the door and knock ” : I could shatter the door, but no man is saved by shattering ; if any man will open the door, I will do all that Love can do : I will come in and never go out again. Now, the same thought has been put in another and harder way, namely, only they to whom Christ reveals himself can ever perceive him. I do not believe it—in that hard, literal, discouraging way. The gospel and discouragement are irreconcilable terms. The gospel does not build up difficulties ; it comes to proclaim the possibility of their removal. Thus men would try to escape, saying, “ I do not see Christ, therefore Christ has not revealed himself to me ; when he does reveal himself to me, I will see him ; when I see him, I shall be a Christian.” No ; I give an emphatic, thunderous No to that practical blasphemy. Christ replies to Need ; Christ makes offers ; Christ preaches good tidings ; and men have it in their power to stop their ears and call

him Impostor. Do we really want to know Christ? I do not mean, as just explained, metaphysically and speculatively and intellectually, as who should say, "This is a problem in history, and we are bound to look at Christ as we have looked at Socrates and Buddha and Confucius; we ought to consider this man, as well as the other men, as a very important character in history." You will never see the Christ. It is only Penitence that sees him. We see him through the telescope of tears; we know him by some touch on the broken heart.

Did Christ always reply to need? The history says he did. Can any instance be cited which proves this? Yes. Take the blind men:—"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!" What did he do? He gave them the day, the summer, the human face, the image divine; he made them rich with sight. "Lord," said the leper, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; and Jesus said, "I will"—I would have all things clean; and the man became a little child. Have we ever uttered these piercing cries? Have we ever cried in the heart, mightily, incessantly for Christ? If so, we have seen him, or we will see him. Another appeal, and he will come; one more cry, and the eloquence will prevail.

Here, then, is the definite and positive work of the Church—to affirm that Christ is alive. Not a theory but a fact; not a guess, but a reality; not a hope, but an experience. Paul could not have done his work if he had not enjoyed other inspiration than the remembrance that Christ was once crucified. Crucifixion cannot inspire. Death cannot really elevate the soul and make it firm for endurance and valiant in war. Death can sadden, can depress the soul, can put out the sun, can roll such clouds around the gates of the morning that the dawn can never

come. If you rejoice in those whom you have lost, it is because they are only lost awhile. They are nearer to you now than they could be whilst they were in the body ; you do not know how thin the film is that keeps heaven out of sight. Tell me that Christ died some nineteen centuries ago, and I will say it was a pathetic incident, but it does not fill me with inspiration and confidence, and a determination to preach something to every creature ; tell me that he died and rose again, and is alive, and is alive for evermore, and with me unto the end of the world : then you feed me, stir me, impassion me, until every faculty of my nature burns with new life, feels upon it the touch of eternity. You have lost the resurrection, and therefore any competitor can overthrow Christ's claims to your confidence. There are men outside who are laughing at you because you are preaching a dead Christ. The men are right. The laughter may be a divine rebuke. If we can affirm that Christ is alive, why, not a council in any county, not a parliament in any country, can for a moment compare with our message ; then all these little secular excitements fall into their proper places, are set in their right perspective.

Let me call for consecrated conviction, wisdom, experience. Christ must be alive to the individual man. It will not do to have simply, as an intellectual conception, that Christ is alive. Christ must be born in each heart the hope of glory, Christ must be the supreme fact in every life ; then will come, without organisation and mechanism, all that is best in revival, in missionary effort, in educational endeavour, and in beneficent practice. Alive to what end and for what purpose ? He never changed his purpose : it can be put in two words—to save. “He is able to save unto the uttermost all that

come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth"—what to do?—to pray, to pray for others, "to make intercession for us." He is alive to comfort us. Do you know what comfort means, etymologically? This word has been allowed to fall into base uses. When we comfort hearts now, it would seem as if we meant that we stroke them, and caress them, and hush them, rock them in some spiritual cradle, or pacify them by some spiritual opiate; and we say, "Now you will be comforted." In a sense, that is true: the nerves of the body may yield themselves to some such treatment, from a physical point of view; but that is not the meaning of the word comfort in the Scriptures. "Comfort"—what does *com* mean? *With strength*, it would seem roughly to mean on the face of it. So it does. To comfort in the apostolic sense of the term, and in the Christ sense of the word, is to give strength, to brace up, to say, "Rise; play the man; and God will feed thee with power!"

## PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, and God of all grace and pity, be pleased ever to look upon us through thy tears ; then wilt thou have compassion upon us, and we shall be redeemed with a great redemption. We are as a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away ; our years are but a handful when all told ; we are as the grass that withereth, we are as the flower of the grass that fadeth away. Thou rememberest that we are dust : thou wilt not plead against us with thy great judgment, thou wilt not thunder upon us with thy great power ; but with gentleness and love and tears thou wilt come near to us and help us, lifting us that we may see the light. The Lord is very pitiful and kind ; his mercy is tender mercy, his kindness is loving kindness. Thou hast nourished us and brought us up ; thou hast gone before us and made the crooked places straight and the rough places plain, and the valley and the mountain have kissed each other in happy reconciliation. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Our sin, looked at in itself, seemed to shadow the heavens with its night ; but looked at in the light of the cross of Christ, behold we say again and again with growing thankfulness, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Thou knowest our frame ; our bones thou didst number and set in their joints ; the measure of our blood thou knowest ; what fire there is in us, thou only canst tell—what room for devils, what room for Christ. Behold, we leave ourselves in thy hands ; thou wilt be pitiful to us with tears ; thy power shall be our defence and our help. We know we have sinned ; we will not tell lies unto ourselves, and deny our wrong-doing : how then shall we tell lies unto God, and stand before him as righteous men ? Our heads are bowed down in shame, our hearts are burning with the fire of self-reproach. We are witnesses against ourselves. Our prayers have sometimes been sins, our almsdoing has been an act of selfishness, our profession has been an attitude of hypocrisy. Yet the Lord will not cast us off ; he will discover himself in our ruins :

and the Lord will see that we are not our own, and what is in us of his own miracle and grace and power he will mightily redeem and protect, and bring to a consummation of love and of wisdom. Thou wilt not cast us away, thou wilt not trample us under foot ; thou canst not so degrade us, because thou hast died for us. The cross of Christ is our argument, our plea, our defence, our joy. Because thou didst not spare thy Son, but didst freely deliver him up for us all, thou wilt surely bring us home even to our desired haven ; and when we land in the summer-land of heaven, we shall say again, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound": otherwise we never should have been found in the land of purity and love. Help us to live in this hope. By hope we are saved; by despair we are lost. Drive away the spirit of dejection, lest the shadow of the darkness become intolerable, and there be no light left in us. O thou who art the light of the world, remain within our souls, that we may live in the day. Wherein we have done wrong, let the Christ plead for us; wherein we have been unkind, selfish, suspicious, wanting in generosity, narrow in mind and thought, the Lord pity us, for in these moments the devil has conquest over even redeemed souls. Thou knowest our moments of darkness, our times of temptation ; thou knowest when we would flee away from thee, and turn thy day into night. Yet thou dost love us : it was after the lost sheep the Shepherd went ; it was for the lost souls that Jesus died. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ; therefore may we listen for his voice, and hear it in our hearts. God grant that we may answer it with great thankfulness and joy ! Amen.

## XI.

## GOD'S "YET."

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things ? YET among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel : nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin."—NEH. xiii. 26.

"**Y**EAT"—but, for all that, notwithstanding, nevertheless —there was none like him. It required the whole Godhead to deliver that verdict on poor, frail, tottering human character. Let us acquaint ourselves with the fact,

and then read the whole verse. Solomon began well and ended ill. Outlandish women caused him to sin ; he had broken the sacred law ; he had, so to say, performed the miracle of trampling himself under foot : " YET"—oh, that light of hope, that sound of music, that syllable of joy ! The whole verse reads thus : " Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things [marry into heathen circles] ? YET among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel." Who then will despise the least ? who then will give up the worst ? who will write his own child's history and conclude it in woe ? Will any one write the history of the prodigal son without ending it in mirth and glee and song and dance and unpolluted revel ? The parable would not have been worth speaking but for that final dance, that shout of household joy. It is but a column until that capital is put upon it ; then it is a pillar of God's own upsetting, and the top of it is lilywork.

What a picture of the mixture of life—its conflicts and difficulties, its occasional prayers, its frequent sins ! Herein men make rough judgments of one another, and imperfect summaries of life and history, thought and purpose. It is not enough to divide things into right and wrong, up and down, in and out. These are elementary distinctions ; these do not belong to the final arbitrament. They are alphabetic and useful. It would be a poor world if it only had a right hand and a left. No man is all good or all bad who is in a conscious process of education. It requires God to be Judge. God will find the majority and the minority in each man's moral faculties and qualities and actions and purposes. Your character will be settled by the majority. The colour is not black and white. Who, indeed, would call black and white colour at all ? God

sees all the gradations and shadings, and all the interplay and promise, and all the final outcome of beauty. Let God be Judge. At certain moments it would be right to sentence ourselves to hell. But no judgment must be founded upon a moment. We must not leave the law with the magistrate, we must derive it from the Legislature—the multitudinous man that represents a great average sense of justice and moral obligation and responsibility. It is even so with ourselves. There are moments in which we might claim the wings belonging to souls—the dove-wings—and flee away into heaven's blue and rest and music; but we cannot open the door of heaven by any right founded upon momentary consciousness and experience. Life is not a moment; it is a career, a purpose, a programme.

There are two *yets*. God's *yet* is one of hope; he pronounces from heaven that the majority is in favour of goodness. Then there is another *yet*, in which man does twice over the sin which has been pardoned. Shall we not rather reverse the chronology and say, there is a *yet* which indicates that man sins against God, then there is a second *yet* which proves that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound? That is the right chronology, if so be our hearts are not wholly given over to the power of evil and the reign of darkness. Solomon was a bad man. He would not have denied the charge himself; witness after witness could have been called who would have proved the treachery of his heart, even if Solomon himself had resisted the impeachment. "Yet." You should take that word into your family. It will shed a rosy light through the darkest chambers of the house, and through the darkest chambers of the soul. Say, the son is bad, I know he must be bad, wickedly and cruelly

bad at times, nay, often : yet—— It requires a mother to say that ; she always stands next to God. You should avail yourself of this judgment in relation to your own heart. Let a man say, “ I know I am bad ; I know I have broken all the Ten Commandments over and over again ; I know that the devil has sometimes had no more willing slave than I am ; I know that I am selfish and cold and cruel ; I know that I ought not to live : YET—oh, what is this that tells me that even for wretches such as I am there is mercy, there is hope? and what is this within me that struggles into prayer? and what prophet can tell me the full meaning of this desire that wants to sing God’s praises, and makes all music mean beside that lofty oblation of thanksgiving?” It is the Spirit of God striving in you. There is a *yet* even in your moral consciousness and experience. Do not be too utterly cast down ; in the worst God may see some glint of light and hope.

Character is measured as a purpose, not as a detail. The magistrate deals with detail ; he sends a man to prison because he has stolen something. That is not a judgment of character ; it is the judgment of an act, a solitary act, an act that may have an explanation behind it, an act so sudden in its temptation and realisation that only God can weigh its moral turpitude in the scales of gold. It is right that man should judge by detail. Man himself is poor, infirm, wanting in keenness and penetration of sight ; he can only see the very openest and vulgarest side of life ; therefore he builds jails and punishes thieves ; ‘tis his petty, blurred, poor imitation of the eternal righteousness that punishes souls. There is a lurid and tragic quality of grandeur about these great men sinning. “ Solomon king of Israel”—sinner,

profane person, victim of himself, a servant in the devil's household ! Is there not a kind of grim comfort in this to such of us as have no environment worth speaking of ? We suppose, in our wise ignorance, that if the environment were better, even God would find it difficult to discover a speck upon the blazing disc of our respectability and even holiness. All history is against this poor view. Adam and Eve did not fall in a metropolitan slum, where falling seems to be the habit and custom of the air ; they fell in the sunniest garden that ever bloomed with unstained flowers. So much for environment. Reformation will never meet the necessity of the human condition. Not larger walls, fences, and boundaries, but rightness of heart, called by some old and not wholly disreputable theologians the grace of God, is what we need. That is the only security that is impregnable and everlasting.

What is the effect of this "yet" in the course of human discipline ? It never prevents punishment. God will not spare the rod. Laceration is part of divine education. We must suffer, and there is no help for it ; and if God could sin, God would suffer. There is nothing arbitrary in penalty, so far as it is administered by Providence. Human penalties may be arbitrary, irregular, and eccentric ; but the punishment, the consequence that follows sin, is divine, inevitable. What is punishment ? Here every man must be his own dictionary. What is punishment to one man is no punishment to another. Personality defines penalty. The point you started from will tell you what hell is. A man who has been accustomed to the highest enjoyments of civilisation will have one definition of a prison, and a man who has lived in meanness and misery and every kind of villainy will have another. As we grow in sensitiveness we grow in the

power of appreciating penalty. To one child a look will be punishment enough ; another could receive the rod and afterwards smile at the smiter. We must not therefore attempt any rough-and-ready summaries of opinion respecting penalty, as to what is everlasting punishment. It is a quality, not a duration. Eternal life is not mere continuance. There is nothing in the mere extension of time. Eternal life is a quality of vitality, a *sort* of life. There are some moments in which we realise all heaven. Out of some ecstasies we come, saying, "God can have nothing more of pleasure." Whatever may be our ignorance, our experience and our consciousness must go for something in these matters. Refinement is in agony where vulgarity is unconscious of shame. What must have been Solomon's punishment ! how long the coiled snakes that gathered themselves round his soul, and punctured and penetrated and smote and burned him as with fiery poison ! Solomon might suffer more in an hour than another man could suffer in a lifetime. No man could write this wisdom and pray these prayers without feeling that every sin plunged him down an infinite depth ; and oh, the stroke at last, the final collision ! for that penalty there are no words sufficiently expressive.

God does not set the less against the greater, as we do ; he sets the greater against the less ; that is his way. Who will not say, "Blessed be his love"? Man being small, being petty at the kingliest, finds a flaw. Thus the wise fool talks : he is honest, he is wise, he is gifted ; he is, on the whole, a man of notable intellectual stature and influence ; but— Man thinks he is clever when he discovers a *but*. He gathers himself up into pharisaic perpendicularity, and says : "I discovered that, I pointed out that frailty, I saw it." There can be no pit deep

enough for a wretch like that. How doth God speak? Thus: hear the music of infinite love:—He has gone astray, he has been unfaithful, he has turned aside from me a thousand times, he has done the things he ought not to have done: YET— That is the difference between human judgment and divine judgment in relation to that greatest of all mysteries, human character. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Your brethren like to speak against you, to have discovered a peccadillo, one little sin, and to have fingers dainty enough to pick out that little hair, and to be able to say, “I've got it!” The Lord saith, “ You have wounded me, and disappointed me, and gone away from me, yet— how can I give thee up? Return!” That is the difference between your human theories and the great divine idea of redemption—God always seeing the best, fixing his eyes upon the salvable points, looking to those elements that are still left out of which he can rear manhood. He will not quench the smoking flax, he will not break the bruised reed.

How easy to prostitute this teaching into an encouragement to sin! If any man will accept this word of hope as implying a licence to do iniquity, that word is not spoken to him; he is a dog in the sanctuary, he has no right to this bread. The more compassionate the Lord is regarding sinners, the more should sinners themselves hate the sin which they have committed. Except the doctrine have this effect upon us, it has either been faultily preached or it has been perversely received. Does God approve of sin? We will not answer a question bordering upon blasphemy; but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that it was sin that developed his greatest, most wondrous love. To sin we owe Gethsemane; to sin we

owe Golgotha ; to sin we owe the five-wounded Christ. So again and again we come upon the old music, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Shall we, then, go round the churches and say, "This man is a sinner, and that man is an imperfect character, and this professing Christian is far from faultless"? No : if we are determined to go round in the spirit of criticism, let this be the tone of our judgment: "If they are so infirm and so imperfect with Christianity, what would they be without it?" No man is so conscious of infirmity as the real earnest Christian himself. He smiles at the gentleness of his fiercest critics ; he says, "If they could know me as I know my own soul, with what epithets would they burn me and dishonour me!" Be not discouraged by public criticism or by private sneering. Be honest with yourselves ; be able to say, "My purpose, by the grace and goodness of God, is right ; it is a sound, healthy, beneficent purpose ; it has been purified at the cross, it has been baptised by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and therefore I will trust in him for the final judgment." When you see the worst, say, "There is something better in him than is evident at this moment." Never take any man at his worst ; God always takes us at our best. If ever we touch the reality of prayer, he answers us then ; he knows we must offer a million words before we come to the one word, the right word, and no sooner do we utter it than he gathers the clouds in his heavens and sends rich rain upon the thirsty land. You may talk six times to him and hear nothing, see nothing, by way of response ; but in the seventh time you will come upon the right chord, the right word, the right appeal ; he will then open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing so great that there shall not be room to receive it. As God therefore takes us at our best, so let us take each other at our best. When we are

infirm, and when our whole course is deflected, when our very speech is blurred, wanting in distinctness, and our prayers reel because charged with selfishness, do not judge one another then. When there is a deed of nobleness done, a word of kindness spoken, an indication that the soul wants to attain a higher level, say concerning each other, "There, THAT is the man!"

## PRAYER.

EVEN so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! When thou art away there is no light in the sky, there is no fragrance in the wind; when thou art near at hand bread is plentiful and light is abundant. We have all things and abound when we have Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God; "we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us." Thou art always wise, always good; so tender that our tenderness becomes rough when compared with it; thine is loving-kindness, thine is tender mercy. Thou hast kept us all our days, and we have wanted nothing. Sometimes we have thought we were going to want, then it was our infidelity that spake, not our faith: sometimes we said, "We shall die to-morrow"; and yet on that dreaded morrow we were younger than we ever were before. These are the miracles of God's love, these are the revelations of God's providence; may we accept them, treasure them, enrich ourselves with them, and reflect upon them when the enemy is hard upon our souls! Thou hast shown us great and strange things, yet thou hast held them all in thine hand; the tumult has only been towards us, never towards thee; there is no unrest in God. Thou dost hold the floods in the hollow of thine hand; the great seas are but a drop of rain before thee. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Thou has set amid all the tumult of the ages a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God. It was but a threadlet, but the water was alive; it was a stream from Siloa's brook that flows fast by the throne of God. Thou art ruling all things to the end of love; thou art rounding and shaping things, and they will all be complete planets in thine own time, full of light, full of morning, full of summer; and the sons of God shall sing for joy amid all the moulded radiant host. May we keep our fingers off thy stars! It is enough that we plunge our fingers into our own morsel of bread: permit us not to handle things that are too great for us. The Lord give us to see that in all the ages there is a moulding hand. If we look back, we see the centuries taking shape; if we look at the present moments, they are all in

tumult, all upside down. There is a miserable and tormenting inversion of things: the first is last, and the last is first, and there is no midst; but, centuries after, we shall see that even in this very moment thou hast been shaping some new pinnacle in thy temple, thou hast been moulding some new star in thy skies; thou hast been doing all things well. Give us the larger view, save us from all things that are provincial, parochial, small, local, miserable; give us views from the great spaces; let us see things in their roundness and wholeness: then we shall sing on the day of peril as on the day of wedding, saying, "He hath done all things well." Lead us through all changes of life, all its scenery and business and family relationships, and show us that all these things are in God's hand and not in ours; and may we know that the universe is thine, not man's, and that thou art making heaven wide as infinity! The Lord rebuke us not with his great wind, or we shall be carried away into the wilderness and be lost; speak to us whisperingly when thou dost deliver thy rebukes to our souls, lest we be cast down and withered up. Make our way for us in life. Many are now at a stubborn gate; it will not open, the key is lost, it would be wrong to climb over it: help us on this side of the perplexing gate to fall down and pray; then when we arise the gate will be wide open. Direct us in all our business affairs. We think we are clever when we are only insane. The Lord show us that all buying and selling, and coming and going, are in his own hands; it is his to make rich and to make poor: may we be faithful, industrious, praying always for the sagacity that is just, and for the justice that is rich with mercy! Be with our dear ones on the sea, with our loved ones far away in the colonies, and in foreign lands, and in strange places. Thou canst make it home wherever they are; thou canst so fill them with hope and light and sweet expectancy that they shall forget all time and distance and separation and accident, and unite in holy sympathy with us at this moment. We pray for those who are farther off still—prodigals who dare not pray; they may not, they think, lift their debauched lips towards heaven; they have worn us out, they have killed their father and their mother, and made all other life within their reach a shadow and a pain. Yet the prodigals are still thine; they have taken a long way round, but even yet thou wilt bring them all home. We bless thee for the dead who have died in the Lord: the fight is over, the crown is won, the heaven is entered. Sometimes we say, "Would God we too were dead and crowned, that the devil might have no more part or lot in our vexed lives!" Bind us to thy cross, thou Saviour of men. Amen.

## XII.

## THE DANGERS OF MONOTONY.

"Because they have no changes, therefore fear they not God."—  
PSALM iv. 19.

WHAT does this mean? Of course it means that the people have no changes; one day is like another, so much so as to be practically indistinguishable from it; and therefore, because of life's monotony, life itself becomes practically atheistic, without God. You see that the text means that, and can mean nothing else; you have never doubted it. That is unfortunate for you, because the text does not mean that. You should not have so readily committed yourself to a definition of the terms. It means exactly the contrary. The primary reference is to the unchangeableness of God: he has no changes; he is not characterised by precariousness, fickleness, mutability, and the like—one thing one day, and another thing to-morrow: he is the unchangeable God, and because of the monotony that is in him the people have forgotten him. If he were always performing some conjuring trick on the battlements of heaven, the attention of the universe might be called to him. The universe likes conjuring. It is a poor universe, a baby-creation, an infantile mockery of a thing. There is no sense in it yet; it is only some million ages old: when it is five hundred thousand million ages old it will begin to know words of one syllable. We are parts of a whole: no one stave is the barrel, no one pebble is the seashore, no one star is the gallery or the galaxy of night. Why do we speak at all? We do but make fools of ourselves, especially in our ablest inspirations.

Yet the text has a human aspect, and may be considered in that light with religious edification and rich profitableness. It is still true, outside of this text and as a counterpart of it, that where there are no changes things are apt to sink into atheistic monotony. It is so everywhere. It is so in nature. If the seasons only came now and then, how differently we should feel regarding them! But seed-time and summer and autumn and winter have demonstrated by procession so long that we permit the procession now to go along any thoroughfare it pleases, and we take no notice of it except as a marketable item. If the east wind has chilled the blossoms, then we take notice of that spring because we shall have no pears in the autumn; but if the season could come with their lapful of pears regularly and throw them into our lap, we should take no further notice of them. If we had no changes we should have no prayers. Who cares about the sunrise? Not two men amongst all my readers saw the sun rise this morning. If the sun rose once in the century we might look at it, perhaps we might write a short paragraph about it,—that would depend on other circumstances; but every morning in God's eastern sky there is a sight that might dazzle the universe and call angels up to matins; and we never look at it.

What is true in nature is true in our social circumstances. A woeful thing it is to any man to have continuous prosperity. A most sad lot is his. He does not know it, because he is little, and half blind, and wholly deaf. See a man who for the last half-century has done nothing but win, and you do not see the most chastened, spiritually refined, sympathetic soul that can be found. He does not understand how it is that you do not succeed, and he does not want to hear any of your complaint or

supplication. He says, "You should have done as I have done: why did you not? I do not understand this man whose hands are both left; men should do as I do, and then we should have no complaining in the street." That is not piety; that is atheism—rankest, foulest, most pestilential atheism. The law applies even in the matter of uniformity of health. The man who is always healthy has no sympathy with people who are ailing. He says so; he rather boasts of it. He does not understand those puling, whining, ailing creatures: he is up regularly in the morning; he has four good meals a day; he never knew one single fit of indigestion; biliaryness, he thinks, is a word derived from some unknown tongue with an unknown meaning,—and if people only did as he does they would be as fresh as rhododendrons at their best. You tell him of your headache: he never had one, he does not believe you have one; he calls you mentally a hypocrite or a hypochondriac, or anything else you please indicative of almost insincerity. Go to the man who has had affliction if you want sympathy; see the soul on which has been rained the very judgments of God if you want to hear a voice that can pray and sing well too.

What ministers so much to vanity as uniform success? Man cannot bear it: man is little, man is young, man is but of yesterday; he has had no experience yet. It would be tempting him too much to give him uniformity of health, and success, and prosperity, and honour, and influence. We are built up by being broken down. God governs, as it were, by paradox. He does by undoing. We should get into the divine scheme and economy of things, and live within it; we should swing with the stars. Why do you want to make a little swinging machine of your own when all the stars are going in one direction?

You turn your screw astronomically: why do you not move your lives in the same way? Why have a little economy of your own when God says, "Behold the chariot of the heavens, the uncounted steeds plunging along and through the fields of space!" Why not join this mighty movement and come home by the way of God? It is a difficult universe if you go dead against it: it is a sweet place, a holy sanctuary, if you accept it on God's lines and work in it in God's spirit. Every great city is much the same. If you once get wrong in London it will take you a long time to get right. Everything is nearly square and right as to the economic movement even of the Metropolis; and if you can consult the lines and times and means, you may proceed with some smoothness and certainty. But if you once become entangled, London cares nothing for you, and would as soon crush you to powder as not. London is an infinite heartlessness; so is every great city. Yet there is a key to even these great cities and civic mysteries and economies, and if we can once get the key we wonder that anybody ever makes any mistake about it. What we want is the key of God's providence, the open-sesame of God: that is the only key we want. Change is part of the divine ministry. God goes back that he may get forward. This is another of the divine paradoxes. There are waves that are reflux, back-flowing, but they only go away that they may come again in fuller force. Refluence may be an aspect of progress. But we take our statistics at given times, and think they are right. Statistics are hardly ever correct. We must take the statistics of ten thousand ages before we know the exact value of to-day. To-day is nothing by itself; to-day should be the reservoir into which all other days pour their experience, their suggestions, their sentiments, their educational ministries and successes. Thus we take our

statistics on a hot day, on a wet day, on a snowy day, on a day that is broken up by a thousand other attractions ; and therefore we get false statistics. In reality, statistics do not belong to any one day in the week, or to any one week in the year ; only those statistics are rightly taken that begin at the beginning and come right up to the last hour the church-bell struck. So, when you look at your own lives, do not look at the day when you were struck down with fever, and at the day when you lost your dearest friend, and at the day when your whole soul was eclipsed in one unutterable disappointment, or at the day when all the air quivered and vibrated with wedding metal : put all the days together, see what a pageant they make, how they move, how they change colour, how they fall into new relations, how kaleidoscopic, how dismembered, shattered, disorganised, and yet suddenly united, geometric in form, celestial in colour, suggestive in aspect ! God is only to be judged by great breadths of time. He takes a thousand years for one page : turn over a thousand pages at once before you begin to know anything about God. " My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,"—work, work, work, and all things work together, in and out, and through and through, and back and forward, and redoubling, and returning, and advancing, intermingling, working together ; in apparent tumult and entanglement and perplexity and involution, yet, when the great web is looked at in a thousand years' cutting, behold there is the beginning of a shape, a pattern, a suggestion of sovereignty, a signal of heaven.

What are the uses of this change ? The uses of this change are many. First of all, it suggests questions. Why this tumult ? Why this alteration ? Why this breach of uniformity ? There is a science that speaks

about the continuity of things, the uniformity of nature. It is a pity we do not use words that are exactly the size of our own mouths. We know nothing about nature. You want ten hundred thousand mouths if you are going to use that word with even an approach to its initial meaning and suggestiveness. We must ask God's judgment about the monotony, regularity, or continuity of nature. We do not know what changes he is making. We have already a microscope that can read so much, but we want that other microscope that can see farther—that perceiving, penetrating microscope that sees what changes God is working millions upon millions of miles away, and that will never come to the surface until the lapse of unnumbered ages. Change helps to show that though details are continually altering, yet there may be an organic and dominant central line. We are puzzled by details. We think everything has changed because a fleck has been removed from the outside. The universe is not an outside. The universe is but an oyster-shell ; the pearl is the purpose of God. "Through all the ages one increasing purpose runs." That is poetry when it is out of the Bible, but it is revelation when it is in the Bible, and there is nothing out of the Bible that is true that is not first in the Bible. Herein is the inspiration of the Book, that every other book that is true is cut out of it. We do not see the purpose in ten years, we do not see the purpose of our own life in ten days. At the time everything was wrong, now we see that everything was right ; it was very hard at the time, simply because we required hard training. God has certain work for us to do, and we could not be brought to do it on confectionery, on feather beds, and on velvet lawns. We had to have our knuckles hardened before we could deal some blows. It was bitter at the time to have no home, no bread, no friend ; it was very

hard to be foiled in that purpose for which we had been training seven years: we went out in the morning to collect a prize, and we brought home at night but a handful of darkness, and we said, "God hath forgotten to be gracious ; to what purpose is it that we serve the Almighty, and to what end is this multitude of prayers ?" Yet now, twenty, thirty, or fifty years afterwards, we say, "Lo ! God was there and we knew it not ; our poor little life was none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven." We must view all life from heavenly heights before we know really what God was meaning by it. We have sometimes called God cruel : one day we will withdraw that word ; we will ask him to allow us to substitute kind for cruel, gracious for pitiless, and we will tell him that we were among the very worst infidels that were ever trained in the little earth-school. We shall see our life from the true altitude ; then we shall know what it is and what it meant, and we shall say, "God hath done all things well." Nothing looks right close at hand. You do not know the size or the importance of anything when it is in your hand or when it is ten feet away. Things look so important when they are close at hand. London is the most important place any man was ever in, and yet you can get behind a thorn-hedge and not see it. It is an infinite place when it has a whole map to itself, but it is nothing on the map of England, and England is nothing on the map of Europe, and Europe is nothing on the map of the globe, and the globe is nothing on the map of the solar system : men have to hunt for it, and to say to the next-door neighbour, "Have you seen anything of the globe ? I cannot see it : can you give me the faintest indication of where this globe is—'the great globe itself'?" Why do we not take in more field ? Why do we not judge things by the meridian of the universe ?

Why have that two-foot rule? It has made atheists of some of you.

And yet, if we go back to the primary meaning of the text, that is just as suggestive as the secondary meaning. God is unchanging in character, in purpose, in sovereignty. The Lord reigneth. It is an infinite comfort, on these grounds. And yet the text is an infinite terror; for wickedness cannot elude him, concealment cannot exclude him, money cannot bribe him. He is righteous and holy, true and just altogether. We build all our hopes upon the unchangeableness of God. When we say, "Is the world ever going to be saved?" if we answer ourselves, we shall answer in the negative; but if we answer from God's point of view we shall answer in the positive: "As I live, saith the Lord, the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Impossible! Yet certain.

## PRAYER.

O THOU gentle One, give us some hint of thy nearness ! Thou knowest what we can best receive, and thou wilt not withhold it. This sign thou wilt work in our hearts, for they wait for thee. We do not want the token for our eyes, we want the sign for our souls. Let some vision pass before our spirits, some new light, some hitherto unseen glory ; or let some whisper beguile the heart out of its despair, and answer all its waiting and expectancy with great satisfaction. May not our hearts burn within us whilst we commune at thine altar ; may we not know that a sudden access of life has flooded all the channels of our being ; may we not experience the uplifting which means heaven in its last issue ? Why may we not see somewhat of the angels ? are they not all ministering spirits, servants of thine and servants of ours ? Help our life towards immortality ; may we not hear something in the soul we have never heard with the outward ear, music too exquisite to be heard by the body ? In thine own way bring the sign ; after thine own measure grant the blessing. Yet may every one know that God is at hand, and not afar off, and that the cross is the nearest object to the vision of the heart. Wonderful is that cross of Thine, Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God ; deeper than all our sin, higher than all our thought, wider than all our desire ! We would live within the circle of the cross. It means forgiveness, thorough, absolute, everlasting pardon, cleansing through precious blood ; the greatest mystery of righteousness and love to be found in all thy universe. May we live near the cross, and love the cross, and serve the cross ! Then the bitterness of death will be past, and we shall already be in the company of those who are clothed in white, and in whose heart there is no pain. Amen.

## XIII.

**LOVING-KINDNESS AND TRUTH.**

"I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.—PSALM xl. 10.

THIS Psalm seems to be one specially calling for the exercise and enjoyment of what may be called publicity. Herein the Psalmist will have no secrets. He relates his own experience, he expatiates upon it, he turns it into song and into speech, and all the earth shall hear what this delivered man has to say. It is very comely is this thankfulness ; and as rare as it is comely. The Psalmist said he missed God. There was nothing in the sky but a great cloud ; there was no door in the cloud ; there was no upward way to the lights that cannot be put out. So saith the Psalmist, " I waited patiently for the Lord " : I almost tired him out with patience ; I importuned him with silence : I have learned, saith the Psalmist in effect, that there is a way of battering upon heaven's door as with violence and repercussion and urgency ; that way I knew well : but in this case I waited patiently for the Lord, I sat as it were on his doorsill with folded hands, saying to my soul, He will come presently ; the longer he delays the greater will be the blessing he will bring with him : I will therefore now find my strength in sitting still ; I will wait ; I will not wait noisily and petulantly or complainingly, but I will wait with that kind of silence which will make God almost wonder. Silence is the child of faith ; silence is the music of faith. " I waited patiently " : I know that the pit was very much filled up with miry clay ; I know that my feet had no standing-place ; I was so situated at that time that I dare

scarcely look round lest I should fall off what little foot-hold I had. It was a sad strait, it was an agony of the soul ; and yet some voice, not man's, some voice of angel or of spirit, said to me, " Let patience have her perfect work " : and not only did God set my feet upon a rock and establish my goings, so that I walked upon a solid, broad thoroughfare right up to heaven, but as I began to walk I began to sing. It was a new song : I never heard the like before ; I knew it without learning it ; it came to me as an inspiration from heaven ; it came to me in some measure as a reward for that long continued silent patience. Trained patience, disciplined waiting, may break into surprising and gladdening song.

What, then, will he do ? He will preach. What now will he do ? He will make up for that silence. If he were silent before God, he will not be silent before man. He cannot keep all these things even in his heart. He says, " These blessings were not given to me to be hidden ; God is not making a mere storehouse of me for his own convenience, so that he can come and open the door and look in upon his treasures, and make audit of the same, and certify that they are still where he left them : every mercy I have received is to be turned back again into a song, into a sermon, into an appeal, into an argument. Thus the life of the Christian, could he but get rid of the dumb devil, would be the most eloquent testimony that could be borne respecting the grace and energy of the cross. It is very marvellous that this religion, rooted in Judaism, blossoming in Christianity, beginning in the Old Testament, and rising into its greatest Pentecostal power in the New, will not allow its recipients and believers to be dumb. Dumbness is blasphemy ; dumbness is heterodoxy. To have had the heart wholly filled with good things from heaven and never to mention the fact—when

you are hunting for heresy, stop at your own dumbness, and convict yourselves of the greatest heresy known to the heart.

Nor does this suggestion of speech end in mere utterance. The religion of the Old Testament began to be restless ; the religion of the New Testament never has a moment, so to say, in which to sit down. Why this energy ? why this rush ? why this quest of new spheres ? You find the reason in the religion itself. Love cannot rest until that one vacant chair is filled up. Love cannot be satisfied until the last child has come home. Love cannot be quite easy until the last lost sheep has been recovered to the fold. Other religions can stay at home and be quiet ; other religions muse and dream and contemplate ; they can see themselves best in a cloud of smoke ; when the eyes are glazed over, and when the head is incapable of energetic thinking, then the religion now referred to seems to float in the air—very beautiful, very exquisite, almost artistic, and requiring almost genius itself to spell out any word of all its meaning. Christianity is otherwise. Its feet are on the earth ; it goes from nation to nation, learns every language as if by right ; its great battle-word and its great love-word is not Israel, but Man. Is there any greater word than Man—except the solitary word God ?—and God created man in his own image and likeness, and made room for him on his throne. Pity will not allow its real believers to be dumb, inert, self-felicitating, and self-satisfying ; it is restless, impetuous, urgent, resurgent ; it will set its feet on every yellow shore, it will grow the fruits of God in every wilderness. Perhaps this is the enthusiastic view : without enthusiasm we can have no living faith. If your faith is only in your head it is useless ; it may be an aggravation of the guilt with which you are chargeable. Faith must

get right down into the heart, into the furnace part of your being, where the fire flames and glows, and there it must enter into the very quality of that fire, and come up again in glory, in the glory of beneficence and heroic endurance and suffering.

The Psalmist had a great text. All Christ's texts are great. The least text he ever spoke stretched itself from horizon to horizon. It might be in words so little that a child could carry it to its mother, and babble it at her knee ; but as to its meaning, poetry, suggestion, issue, every word of Christ fills infinity. The Psalmist had a great subject ; what was it ? It was two-fold : " Thy loving-kindness and thy truth." Why, there is nothing else. He has taken all the subjects in one great text ; he has brought all the flowers and all the fruits back to the first little seed or root, and there he stands, the great preacher of the great kingdom of the great double truth. Every succeeding preacher must go to the Psalmist and say, " Lend me one of your texts ; there is no other : ' loving-kindness ' fills the sky, ' truth ' bears up that sky on eternal pillars." We may often know a man by his subjects ; we may know where the heart has been by the talk of the tongue : " out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." This man says he will speak of loving-kindness and of truth ; he will sing a song of mercy and of judgment ; he will hide nothing ; everything shall be coloured by his own personal experience of its reality. That is preaching—great texts passed through a great experience, uttered in a great passion and thankfulness.

What will this man of music do ? What has he done ?— " I have preached righteousness in the great congregation : lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart ; I have

declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation : I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation " : thou hast delivered me, and I have spoken of nothing else since the time ; Lord, I have had but one subject : I have not called in abstract argument and metaphysical bewilderment ; I have told everybody, the single man, and the congregation a thousand strong, that I was in a pit, and I was lifted up, sinking in the mire and was delivered ; and I have ascribed all the redemption to thy loving-kindness and thy truth ; and while life or breath or being lasts, or immortality endures, I can never change that theme. These words will make an impression upon the world ; enthusiasm of this range and quality cannot be lost. There is a passion that kills itself ; there is a suicidal energy. But with such a theme, such an experience, such a man, such a manner of speech and of song, this man David will be the sweet singer of the ages, and no enemy can strike from his skilled fingers the harp on which he re-reveals the living God. The Church has lost her harp ; she has now settled into prose. Any odd words which the market-place has done with are quite sufficient for the Church now. She takes up the leavings of other speakers ; she imagines that by doing so she has got rid of all the "old puritanic cant" and is now talking the language of the times. She likes to speak in the accent of the day ; the holy twang she has lost, the old way of uttering God's truth she has abandoned ; all her ancient customs have fallen into desuetude, and she herself has lost her backbone and her brain and her knee-joint, and the poor old decrepit cripple can hardly stand ; and the enemy is laughing at her. He has wrought great wonders in her vocabulary. He has taken out most of her keywords, and having held them up, he has said to the Church, " You would not think of using this

again ; this is archaic, this is quite old-fashioned ; I think this word had better be thrown away " : and so the enemy has taken up all her keywords and all her characteristic sentences and teachers, and burned them, and having burned the last, he says, " Now we may go forth and speak the language of the day " Amos would not have listened to him ; Joel would have burned him in his oven ; Hosea would have made him ashamed of himself by the exquisiteness of prophetic spiritual refinement : but we meaner men, fallen sons of immortal sires, are willing to take out all such words as loving-kindness and tender mercy and compassion, and to take up with words that are so shallow no man can drink out of them to the quenching of his soul's thirst.

What will the Psalmist speak ? " Loving-kindness " and " truth." Then he must have known them. He cannot speak of these things unless he have had experience. No sermon can be really preached that is not sincere. By sermon in this sentence I mean speech of the heart, speech about God in the spirit of God. No man can call Jesus, Lord, but by the spirit. He can say " Lord," but all the music will be gone. He can use religious phrases, but the religious atmosphere is dead ; and we are largely dependent upon atmosphere for the very deepest and best effect. The word is not enough ; we must hear the tone, we must know on what level the voice travelled, we must measure the degree of heart that was in the vocable. No man can preach of loving-kindness and truth deeply, sweetly, effectively, who has not companied with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. You can have polysyllables enough ; you can have theories, inventions, suggestions, hypotheses by the thousand : but real, direct, vital, redeeming, saving,

glorifying truth you can only receive from lips that have been bathed in the fire of God. The Psalmist did not say he would endeavour to speak of these things. Preaching is not an effort. It is not something that the soul has brought forth with great pain ; it is the utterance of the soul's experience. It is not afraid of the paltry charge of egotism. The Psalmist was not afraid or ashamed of the first personal pronoun. Said he : " I am the man ; I was in the miry pit ; I was in the shrinking clay ; my feet had almost gone and slipped ; I was brought low." A little more personality in our religious testimony might subject us to a charge of egotism by those who do not know what egotism is, but it would add immensely to the fervour, the piquancy, and the effectiveness of our declaration. If we can be the illustration as well as the argument, what can stand before our revelation of the truth of God ?

What was the authority of the Psalmist's ministry ? His experience. There is no other authority. No man can give me authority to preach. If I am so filled with the presence of God and the goodness of God to me that I must speak, my experience is my authority. No other man could speak for me as I could speak for myself. Every heart has its own eloquence, every man his own individuality of testimony. Be faithful to your experience of the loving-kindness and truth of God, and in that faithfulness find your highest authority.

How complete was his theme ! He says, " I will speak of loving-kindness." Mark the history of preaching, declaration, and testimony. Every ministry goes down that is not charged with pathos. Metaphysics die : Pity lives as long as Misery. The academician gives up the ghost : the Apostle tarries till the last wound is stanch'd and the last relief is administercd. You cannot find the,

people in their multitudinousness waiting upon any ministry that is not prophetic, that has not as its basal line, its undertone, and its supreme music, the pity, the compassion, and the tears of God. All other preaching is to classes. Hence the variety of pulpit reputation we find all over the world. Here is a man who is adored by one hundred people, but by no more. He is learned, he is a man of penetrating mind, he is almost bold enough to try to write a Bible of his own. He has nearly completed a new invention of ways to righteousness and peace and heaven—but he has not quite completed it. How the hundred love him, hang upon him, believe there is nothing like him ! They never shed a tear, they were never moved by the deepest pity ; and men's souls, hearts, cannot grow upon dry philosophy. Here is another man who knows little of letters or human learning ; he does not despise them, he is too wise to despise knowledge in any form or in any degree, but he is characterised by love, by a great heart, by that vast-souledness which seems to take in everybody, the worst, the vilest, the lowest. He turns none away ; he never excommunicates any soul ; he has no standard which entitles him to drive away a heartache : nay, saith he, to every man having a heartache, "Stay, we want you ; it will be your turn next ; do not for your own sake or for Christ's sake leave this great holy home." Trace, I say, the history of all great ministries, and you will find that loving-kindness, and all that loving-kindness represents, is the secret of any deep, wide, lasting hold, not only on the popular imagination, but on popular confidence and honour.

But loving-kindness must be interpreted in the light of truth. If we have mercy, we must have judgment ; if we have love, we must have righteousness ; if we have senti-

ment, we must have law. The flowers must grow upon rocks. Not that the rock need be visible, or but one inch deep in the soil,—there may be a foot of soil or ten feet ; but under all is the stable, steady rock. We must therefore have truth, not always truth formulated, defined, set forth in arithmetical series and enumerations, but truth in its spirit and essence. No one man has all the truth. You must hear all ministers if you would hear the ministry. Some men can only speak about truth. They are argumentative, combative, controversial ; they are analytic, inductive ; they must search out reason and cause, and put into regular series all their discoveries. So be it. Their service is not to be despised. Other men are all tears ; they can hardly look down on a city without weeping over it, and saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! poor Jerusalem !—fated because guilty.” There are preachers who can scarcely look upon an audience without being melted into tears : there are so many broken hearts, so many shattered hopes, so many overturned ambitions, so much prodigality, so much backsliding, so much vowing and vow-breaking, so much painful tragedy. Then these preachers will speak tearfully, kindly, lovingly, sympathetically, and all sorts of people will answer their tender appeal. When the two can be united we approach progress : but do not blame the one man because he is argumentative, and the other because he is emotional. Hear them both ; they are both servants of God.

A great congregation needs a great ministry. We are not all of one degree or quality of mind. One man can find all the sermon he needs in a single sentence ; one man has completed his festival in the church the moment the minister has said Amen to his first prayer ; that guest says, “That will do, on that I can live a whole week, on that I

can go many days ; thank God for that vision of light." But there are others, slow minds, partially weak minds, that require very careful and specific treatment, and those who are strong must wait for them. What say you to that chariot driving on, hasting up hill, down hill, and all the people upon it know that a little child has fallen off—what is your verdict ? Do you say to the charioteer and all his fellow-travellers, "Quite right, you cannot wait for children and for cripples ; go on ?" No ; you will not have it so ; you say, "Wait !" Why wait ? The child. But only a child. There is no *only* a child ; there is no such creature in God's universe. A child is a man, an angel. Let us have no frivolous counting of statistics, as who should say, "A great philosopher, and a little insignificant child." No ; the insignificant child may be the real philosopher. Where there is life there is deity ; where there is man there is God—be it in little child or in old pilgrim just measuring his own grave.

So, then, the great congregation needs great treatment. Now the preacher hurls a terrific rebuke at some ; now a cutting reproach is thrust upon others ; now a tear is dropped upon a sad heart : suddenly one flash of light kindles the whole, and all men seem to see their next way, and their next step ; then a great, gentle, quieting prayer in which all human feeling, sorrow, sadness, woe, is hushed into the tranquillity which brings strength. I appeal, therefore, for a large tolerance ; I appeal for a true charity—that is to say, in judgment and in criticism. The theme is infinite, any one speaker is finite. Let him do what he can, either with the loving-kindness or with the truth, and if it be given him of God to touch both with a master's hand, then thank God that there is a prophet in Israel.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**, may we live and move and have our being in thee ; then shall our thoughts be large, and our love shall be pure and warm, and our whole life one act of joyous obedience. Show us that all obedience is from God ; teach us that we can only obey as we are one with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; yet he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, became obedient unto death, yea, even the death of the cross. He endured the cross, despising the shame, knowing that the cross well borne means the crown in heaven. Show us that our will must be broken, or we cannot be men acceptable in the sight of God ; and show us that our will can only be truly broken as it is broken on the cross of Christ. If thou wilt thus permit us to look upon all life from the sanctuary of great principles, all life will become easy, pain will be a sacrament, sorrow and loss will be angels sent to take us on the road that leads upward. Otherwise, we shall be in daily fret and care and misery ; we shall have no centre, no rock, no solar light. Help us, then, to abide in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed to us by the Saviour of the world when he died upon the cross, and when he rose from the tomb. Thou knowest how little we are, how prone to adopt wrong measurements—how we set up our own little standards, and come thereby to false conclusions. If we could but walk with God ; if each could but be the friend of God ; if we could be on earth and yet in heaven, as was the Son of man,—then we should see that even Gethsemane and Golgotha lead on to heaven. Thou knowest who are carrying heavy burdens, thou knowest whose hearts are sore with grief, thou knowest whose eyes are blind with tears that are impious because unbelieving : wilt thou come to us with times of refreshing ? wilt thou lift us upon some mountain-peak, whence we can see something of the wholeness of things ?—then we shall come back in the morning to our labour singing, though our burden be none the less. Look upon our houses, families, businesses, and all our

interests, and enable us to look upon them from a high standpoint. The Lord inspire us daily by the Holy Ghost, the Lord deliver us from evil; all littleness is evil, all pettiness is a section of wickedness. Lead us not into the temptation of considering the part the whole, or almost any part of the whole; lead us to see that we have seen nothing yet; and in our blindness and weakness and self-helplessness may we be found with our love clinging to the Cross. As for guidance, we look to thee: hold thou us up, and we shall be safe; guide us with thy counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory. Amen.

## XIV.

## THE COMPENSATIONS OF LIFE.

"Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters."—I CHRON. ii. 34.

WE have often seen that amongst the Jews and in some Eastern countries, daughters go for nothing. They are not counted in the family census. If a Jew had six sons and five daughters, he said he had six children. When reminded that he had five girls, he would say, "Yes; but girls are not counted." We have advanced since then. What has brought us on our way? A multitude of ministries, but all centred in the great Christ-life and Christ-thought. My purpose in dwelling upon this unique text is not to speak as about sons and daughters, but to seize the principle that if a man has not one thing he has another, and that we ought to reckon up what we have rather than moan and pine about what we have not. This lesson is always needed. It is more needed by the common people than a lecture upon ancient heresies, than an address upon remote and partially incomprehensible metaphysics. We want human lessons, domestic theology, household reasoning, and piety. We ought to be taught how to count our treasures. If we have not one thing,

we have another. We do not want a list of blanks, if it be possible to draw one: we want a list of positive possessions and treasures; and every man can draw up such a list if he will. There is not a lad, how ragged and desolate soever, that has not his own little song, his own occasional laugh, his own transient, but palpable, comedy. There is a patch of blue on every sky. Why this long moan about the dark clouds, the frowning heavens? Why not now and then pick out flashes of blue, flecks of whiteness—signs that behind all darkness there burns the eternal morning? That is how it is proposed to use this text—"No sons, but daughters"; the word "but" not a disjunctive, separating sweetness from bitterness, not a "but" with a subtle tone of contempt and undervaluation in it—rather a word that indicates that though the one side was a poor record, the other side was a radiant and grateful witness.

Now, what have you? Let us take account of what you have. You have no money, but you have wonderful mental power. Think of that. You have a clear head, you have a far-seeing eye, you have internal resources: you can muse, and think, and contemplate, and dream, and express yourself to yourself in wordless poetry. You have high times with yourself. Many a festival you have alone; you are quite sorry when you hear an approaching footfall, because it breaks up the sweet and sacred revel. You call yourself a poor man. Why, I put you down as a millionaire—a man who can think himself right up into heaven, a man who can look at the wholeness of things, so far as that is possible to our present low estate—a man who can hear the going of God in the wind. Is he poor? is he lonely? is he to be pitied? Pity the man whose hands are yellow with counted gold, but whose heart is without

a thought of heaven, or immortality, or God. Put down your treasures. You have no external fame, then what have you? You have an excellent repute at home; that is better. I would not care what the world says about any man if he is not loved at home—if their hearts at home do not weary for him and say, “His very speech has music in it.” I would not care to have a world following a man if the people at home did not long for him, and think he was the very best man in all the world. That is how you stand to-night. You do not know how much you are loved and honoured; and you would be loved and honoured more if you could think less about yourself and your destitution of external fame. They love you and honour you at home: they say when you come home the whole house will be full of light and music and joy; or if they do not so express themselves they will say, “When he comes home we shall feel that the foundations of the house are all right: we shall have a judge within our own four corners, a man of great counselling power, a man of equity, an arbitrator in the house, a referee of our own; what he says will be the word of justice, and will be the verdict of equity—a strong, honest, oak-hearted father ours.”

Are you a poor man? are you to be pitied? Do you look over those whose personality was sworn at over £500,000 and call yourself a poor man? Their personality ought not to have been sworn at half a farthing. It is a lie to call it personality. How well it is called personality! I am glad that the law has, by the removal of one letter, saved that word from being confused with personality. They had personality, but you have personality, individuality, fine heart-life, and you make your little house glad; when your shadow falls on the wall,

the wall is pictured with beauty. I will not have it that you are poor. You have no high connections ; you are never troubled with finding out whether there was not, about five hundred years ago, a duke in your family. That duke gives you no trouble. There are many persons who think there was a duke in the family about five hundred years ago, and they have got no end of old soiled yellow paper ; but there is wanting one marriage certificate. If they could find that ! You and I have no trouble about that duke ; we know there never was a duke in our family ; if there was, we should be sorry to know it. You have no high connections. I have heard of a boy who lives on the good-nature of other people, on the ground that he has, or had, or ought to have had, an uncle who was a knight. Do you know how to spell that kind of knight—with a large K ? You and I have no trouble even with the knight. No ; we stand squarely out in poverty, in honour, in faculty, in power of prayer. God is in the family : his altar is there ; and there we have high connections—earls of eternity, aristocrats of piety and nobleness, good-loving and good-doing. Are you a poor man ? If you know the way to God in your sorrow, what is the way to any bank of money compared with that high road ? No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast go up thereon ; they shall not be found there. And you, born poor, and trained on unbuttered bread, and not known by those of fame and name, you have high connections, you have come to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the blood of Jesus, the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. See, up there lie your riches ; yonder at the road-end begins your inheritance. I will not have it that you have nothing, so long as you can pray and receive answers to prayer, so

long as you can hold generous commerce with heaven : you have all things and abound ; and when men tell you of the negative condition or side of your life, you hasten to the positive and constructive side, lay your hand upon your treasures and say, "These, every one, these are the gifts of God."

You have no genius, but you have common-sense. And common-sense is genius. Genius is awkward to live with ; genius never goes to bed at the right time or gets up at the right time, or does anything in the ordinary way, and is altogether awkward, eccentric, unmanageable, and queer ; but common-sense, a good, square, honest, sound-thinking head—God set that head on those shoulders ; it swings well, it moves upon the right pivot. I will not therefore have it that you are poor, and that you are to look upon the negative side of your life, so long as you have such a neck and head. You have common-sense, power of sound and comprehensive thinking : you have that almost greatest of all possessions, judgment. It is not always thought you have it, because there are two judgments : there is a little prudence, neat, well-dressed, self-protecting, self-idolatrous—a very pretty toy ; and there is that other prudence, which may be yours—the great, magnanimous, sometimes venturesome, sometimes audacious, prudence that conquers by the very splendour of its boldness. I must not, therefore, allow you to withdraw from the Church, as if God had forgotten to be gracious to you, so long as you have that power of criticism, judgment, balancing, and decision upon practical matters. That, in your case, is the seal of God upon you. Oh, break it not ! Preserve it ; show it to him at the last, and say, "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me this one talent ; it has been the saving of my life."

You have no health—that may be true ; but you have

wonderful cheerfulness, wonderful spirits. When I want to be raised out of my depression, I come to see you. I find you in bodily infirmity and in bodily suffering ; and yet your vivacity, high-spiritedness, cheerfulness, I find to be contagious and remedial. I wonder how you can be so glad when you seem to have so much to carry and so much to endure. You are preaching the gospel of cheerfulness : you are showing that Christ can dwell in a man who has hardly any body at all, or a body that is in continual dilapidation and suffering. It is possible to triumph over infirmity. The apostle shook himself from all his ailments and said, " Yea, we glory in tribulations also." He counted his infirmities in his riches. He had the spirit of cheerfulness ; in other words, the spirit of contentment ; in other words, the spirit of trust : for he said, " I am not living a haphazard life ; all these things fall out to me by appointment, and thus I am called upon to illustrate and honour the Cross of Christ." If we could talk so, we should all find that we have a good deal to be thankful for. Magnify the things you have, and do not look at the things you have not.

No feet—that may be so ; but what wings ! No wings—possibly ; but what feet ! You cannot run quickly ; but how rapidly you can think ! You can be in the centre of the sun in a moment. A dog gets no farther on : he has no solar system ; he has a master, a kennel, and a bill of fare he cannot read. But you can be across the ocean ; some of you are there now : you are thinking of the son that is in Australia, and the daughter just married in America, and the missionary just beginning his work in Polynesia, and you are thinking of the friend who is in the middle of the Atlantic. You can be round the world before the lightning. Is this nothing ? Are all these to

be counted nothing in the presence of some momentary infirmity or transient trial? Why, you have got hold of the right end of things. In what you have, if such be your possessions, you have begun the infinite. All other things have endings; but what I have now indicated as possible possessions are but beginnings, always beginnings, enlarging but never composing and concluding the whole. I call upon myself, and I call upon you, to be thankful, contented, glad. If we have not one thing, we have another: if we have not the outside, we have the inside; if we have not the physical, we have the intellectual; if we are not descended lineally from the Plantagenets, we may be intellectually the descendants of Aristotle and of Shakespeare; we may be allies of the martyrs; we may be the inheritors of immortal power. Think of the bright side; and when you go home to-night, make this the very brightest night you have had at home. Which is the man who grumbles most? I should not wonder if that man has most. He thinks it is almost religious to be complaining. It is not at all religious; there is not one sparkle of piety in such moaning and complaining. All true religion or true Christianity consists of the spirit of music, song, gladness, triumphing over sorrow and weakness. That is the spirit of the Cross when it is infused into our daily and general life.

Some of you have both sons and daughters; some of you are good on both sides of the statement. You have money, and you have thought; you have health, and you have cheerfulness. What shall we say of you? If you are using these great riches well, we say, "God multiply them tenfold." I would rather you had them than the bad people had them. I would that all the wealth of the world were in the hands that had been crucified with

Christ ; then it would be distributed liberally, wisely, usefully. But these sons, what are you making of them ? You have the whole making of them in your hands. Not, if you allow them to be five and seven years of age before you interfere. If you begin at the right time, it is you that I charge with the direction of the son ; but if I am not spoken to in the right tone until I am five years of age, I am the master of the house. There is a great deal of moaning and complaining at present about our sons leaving their fathers' Church and their fathers' religion. Whom do I blame, if there is any blame in the matter ? I blame the father—the moaning, complaining father. He actually sent his son to an unsuitable boarding-school. That is where the mischief began. There are good schools : these exceptions should be carefully singled out and magnified ; but I should not wonder if many boarding-schools, particularly boys' boarding-schools, are the most awful sinks of iniquity under God's heaven. That is where the mischief is ; and until you get to the root and core of the matter, all your talk is in vain. You want your boy to be a miracle ; you want him to be supernatural or superhuman. If I were to appoint a boy to live five days a week in the chimney, and he came out rather black, and I said, "I am rather sorry to find that this boy is a little sooty in his complexion," who would be to blame—the boy or the man ? If I sent a girl to be grinding wheat and making flour five days a week, and she came home rather white and sprinkled all over with a kind of soft, warm snow, and I should say, " Well, I am sorry to notice that my girl is not so dark and black as she used to be," who would be to blame ? He who begins in common-sense, he who is trained upon rather hard and sharp lines—he is the boy who, as a rule, turns out to be the man of the State, the pillar of society, the

broad soul and sound judgment, that can be referred to in critical times and days of difficulty. And as for you, boys, crying, puling boys, that want this and want that—no, I am wrong ; there are no such boys here ; they are wise, self-controlled boys that hear me now, and I never care to address the absentees.

What are you going to do with your treasures, with your children, with your faculties, with your opportunities ? This is the greatest age that ever shone from the sun ; the time was never so pregnant with opportunity, so rich in the holiest chance of doing good : what are you going to do ? Let us number up our riches and say, “ All these riches are so many calls and tokens of God, and we are to work along these lines ; and if they are God’s lines, they will lead to God’s heaven.” Nor can all this be done from the outside, and mechanically. “ Ye must be born again.” Until you begin with the right spirit, you never can have the right works. Until you have God dwelling in you, by the power of God the Holy Ghost ruling and directing your whole soul, you can do nothing with the hand. I tell you what you can do with the hand : you can take a watch that is all dead inside, and empty indeed, and you can put the hands right ; the clock has just struck eight ; I can put my watch to eight and say, “ I’m right : see ! I’m right.” That is what your philanthropists, and reformers, and inventors, and theological speculators will do for you. They will put you right for the moment. But I want to be right for ever : I want to beat time with the pulse of God, and that can never be done but by the power of God as incarnated in the Saviour of the world.

## PHASES OF TEXTS.

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**"Things that are coming, and shall come."**—ISAIAH xliv. 7.

Jesus Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would show the Church "things that are coming." Here is the very expression in the prophecies of Isaiah. The Authorised Version speaks of "things that are to come,"—literally things that are coming. The Bible is the most hopeful of all books. It never ceases to speak of the future, and to give us poetry in anticipation of fact; and when it has given us the fact it carries it back and up to the poetry whence it came. In the book of Genesis we have the greatest promise of all, respecting "the seed of the woman." Amongst the things that are coming we must reckon Right, Liberty, Peace, and Union. The future is on the side of good: evil has no future; goodness has an endless and glorious duration. The future is the garden of history. We have had wilderness enough; we now want to hear about the garden and the orchard of God. Of these we can hear most truly in the Bible. The future is the inspiration of the

present. Imagine for a moment that we have no promise regarding the days that are to come; how depressing and how intolerable would the present instantly become. In this sense posterity has done much for us. It is the anticipatory power in life. It draws us forward with many a cheer and many a dawning glory. When we think of men as they are, we may well feel disappointed and discouraged; but when we think of men as they are going to be, under the transforming power of the cross, we cannot keep back the Magnificat which spontaneously rises in the glowing and thankful heart. The future is the harvest of the present. We have to do with the responsible seed-time. "Be not deceived,—whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Things that are coming are things which we ourselves may have shaped and coloured. The bad man is digging his own perdition. We are now beginning our best fellowships and affinities. Jesus Christ never expresses a fear respecting the future. Nor did the prophets. The wilderness is to blossom as the rose.

The great ice-fields are to break up, and where the snow thickly lay there are to be fragrant flowers, which we may regard as the miracles of the cross. Jesus is to have the heathen for an inheritance. He is to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. We are in reality largely making the future, and making a future we shall never live to see ! Yet who knows what we may see from the height of Heaven ? The world lives on promise—what our children are to be ! What reconciliations are to be effected ! What wildernesses are to be reclaimed ! Even in the days of his flesh Jesus saw the fields whitening unto the harvest. Even if we did not live to see with our bodily eyes a regenerated and sanctified world, that issue would be worth working for ; good doing has about it already the heavenliness and infinite compensation of a glorified existence.

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**"Things that make for peace."**  
—ROM. xiv. 19.

Peace is a large word. Things may make for quietness without really making for peace. There can be no peace where there is no righteousness. The kingdom of heaven is first pure, then peaceable. There is too much so-called "hushing up." Nothing is really settled until it is settled really.

There are three processes which by their very nature make for peace in the deepest and largest sense. (1) *Confession.* There must be no

keeping back part of the story. "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins." The heart cannot be at rest until the secret has been cast out of it. (2) *Repentance.* Repentance is not sorrow for the consequences of sin, which may be nothing more than a mean and selfish regret, but sorrow for the thing itself as a wound inflicted upon the very heart of righteousness. Beware of superficial, sentimental, transient repentance. The tears must come from the heart and not from the eyes only. (3) *Restitution.* Zacchæus said he would restore fourfold if he had wronged any man by false accusation. Repentance without restitution is an aggravation of the original offence. Where restitution is literally impossible it may be made sympathetically, and the spirit of restitution may affect all the subsequent acts of the life. Restitution can never be made for a broken heart, but the guilty heart may be softened into tender considerateness for other lives.

If the question is asked, "If we can destroy our character can we not reconstruct it ?" The answer is an emphatic, "No." Reconstruction is a very limited power. If a nail is driven into a piece of wood it can easily be extracted, but by what process can a wound be healed ? If a vase be shattered can it be made exactly as it was before it was broken ? If you pluck a flower can you set it back in the stem ? A hundred illustrations of this kind will at once show that reconstruction

is often absolutely impossible. It is so in the case of character. But can God himself reconstruct a shattered life? God does not reconstruct, he creates. Between these processes there is an infinite difference. "If any man be in Christ Jesus" he is a new creature; he is not put together again, he is born again; he undergoes the holy process known as regeneration. "We are created anew in Christ Jesus." This is the miracle of divine grace, not to be explained in words, but to be graciously felt in the daily evolution of experience. Are we prepared for the process of recreation? Without recreation there can be no peace of conscience. Jesus Christ is our peace. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Every attempt to make man better than he is, is but mechanical and changeable. A man is not at peace either with God or with himself until the devil is deposed from the throne of his will and the throne of his affections. We have no more to do with our second creation than we had with our first, so far as the method of creation is concerned. The difference between our first creation and our second creation is that in the second instance the re-created man is himself a consenting party. Our consent does not dissolve the mystery, but it brings us into happy relation to it. Hear the great cry and answer it. Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace.

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"Things present."—ROM. viii 38.

Such "things" may be (1) *contemptuously* regarded. It is a mistake to suppose that even transient things have no lasting lessons. It is ridiculous to under-rate pedigree, wealth, social opportunity, or physical advantages. The business of the wise man is to ascertain the exact worth of these things and to use them accordingly. (2) Such "things" may be *over-rated*. This is the temptation of superficial minds. Probably some persons would value a complexion more than a character; or a balance at the bank rather than credit for doing generous and helpful deeds. Beauty is said to be only skin deep. To over-rate such things is as unwise as to under-rate them. Here, as in many other cases, wisdom is in the medium. (3) Such "things" may be *used* without being abused. Such as pleasure, recreation, prosperity, public esteem. Wealth is to be used, not abused. We abuse wealth when we buy ourselves off from discipline or duty, or social service. Many men may give a guinea where they ought to give a life. Jesus Christ had "glory" with the Father "before the world began," yet he came to live a life of pain and die a death of sacrifice.

Many practical reflections arise out of our contemplation of "things" present. (1) We see them but a moment. The moment of revelation is always sudden. Revelation is seldom more than momentary, yet it may leave a lifelong impression on

heart and mind. June lives but thirty days. No year has ever two Septembers. (2) We cannot form *complete* judgments about any of the things around us. At present they are all partial, initial, of the nature of outline and skeleton. We cannot form complete judgments even about our friends. Life comes and goes. An accident may change the whole face of things. We must learn to put even accidents in their proper places. "Judge nothing before the time." (3) We have some chances only once. We should know things that are really "present"; they are so many opportunities, they may be as rising tides, they may be as the time for sowing seed; a salutation may open up lifelong prospects. The "present" is the moment of agony. Not what you did yesterday, or may do to-morrow, but what we are called upon to do at this moment, is often the supreme question in life.

Let us pray for the spirit that can see things future in things present. By the future we must be drawn on and up. Why this study of the alphabet? That one day we may be able to read. Why this sowing of seed? That one day our garners may be full. Why this apprenticeship? That one day we may be able to work with expertness and ease, and thus turn labour itself into music. *Now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation! "Hadst thou known in this thy day." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." Such are the words of Scripture regarding the moments through which our life is passing.

"Things that are above."—  
COL. iii. 2.

It is a profitable exercise to collect the instances in the New Testament in which the word "above" occurs. It is a most fruitful and suggestive word. There is an "above" in every mind. People say they are "above" doing such and such things, or adopting such and such habits, or mixing with such and such company. There is an "above" which completes earth and time. "As the heaven is high above the earth so are my thoughts above your thoughts." "Set your affections on things above."

What are the things that are above? (1) *The perfect standard.* In the sanctuary above are the golden scales and weights. The ideal of righteousness is in the heavens; we must not compare ourselves with ourselves; we must be measured by the standard that is on high. Morality may be a mere attitude or posture, a calculated and mechanised conduct. Judged by the standard that is above, morality may be one of the calculations and tricks of hypocrisy. (2) *The fountain of grace.* Earthly wells cannot satisfy our thirst. The whole conception of redemption begins in heaven and returns to the glory of heaven. The law is a fact which science might have discovered, which indeed prides itself on discovering; but grace is divine revelation. We have come to see that grace may be the higher law. It is an error to suppose that grace is a mere sentiment. Grace is the pity of righteousness. (3) *The*

*brightest hope.* "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." The lights are all above. It is impossible for the earth to be anywhere but under our feet ; the noonday sun is always above our heads. The lights we strike are always perishing in the very use. As the perfect standard is above, so, of course, is the perfect discipline. "He that hath this hope purifieth himself." The hope does not lull us into criminal slumber, it awakens and quickens us into the highest activity of self-culture and social service. To know the full meaning of "things that are above" we must pass through the gate of death. We die to live. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Our earthly house of this tabernacle is doomed, a doom in which we acquiesce, because we have a house not made with hands. The pursuit of "things that are above" elevates the whole range of human thought, and unites in the true socialism all the interests of the world. In all spheres of life a man bears the impress of his own ideals. How noble then and how glorious should be the life of him who draws his whole motive and encouragement not from the things that perish, but from the "things that are above?" Do not let us talk about these things ; in God's name and strength let us try to live them.

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"Things which he possesseth."

—LUKE xii. 15.

Such things are often *earned*. "If a man will not work neither shall he

eat." As the sleep of the labouring man is sweet, so is all treasure that is secured by honest effort. There is a value in money that has been worked for quite different from the value of wealth that has come without labour. Many things are *inherited*. Sometimes even character may be said to be derived. Estates are inherited and are possessed by the hand without necessarily securing the appreciation of the heart. Some things are held on *trust*. This is so in the case of certain properties. We should look upon all our possessions as carrying with them special responsibilities. Man is only possessor for a moment, during that moment he should act with the faithfulness of a steward. Children are held on trust. Parents should consider that children should be trained for God.

Some things which men possess are *incommunicable*. They are part of the soul itself. Genius, for example, no man can bequeath to his son. The son may be better for the father's genius, but the genius itself cannot be willed or put under the care of an executor. The same thing may be said of learning. No man can hand on his acquisitions. The acquisitions are special, peculiar, personal. Every man has to reap his own field of learning. Think of it, that the greatest philosopher cannot start his own child with the initial possession of the alphabet. Every child, son of prince or son of peasant, must conquer the alphabet for himself. What is true of genius and learning is also true of moral

character. We cannot hold character by proxy. If our privileges in this direction have been great, any violation of their spirit will aggravate our guilt. A praying father may have a blaspheming son. On the other hand a blaspheming father may have a praying son.

Possession falls within the great law of *distribution*. To get we must give. Nothing is put into the hand of man that is not intended to be used for the good of society. The handful of corn is of small value in itself if put under lock and key, but handed over to the ministry of nature it may in due time become a great harvest. Distribution is not loss; it is only another form of gain. "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

Men ask whether they may not do what they please with their own. My answer is "Certainly, but you must first find what is your own." Is not my money my own? Certainly not, your very hand with which you grasp your pelf is not your own. The hand may have made the money, but who made the hand? If anything is our own, how singular it is that we cannot take it away with us! The property is ours only that we may leave it. We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.

Covetousness is never rich, simply because it can never have enough. Covetousness is never happy, because it is always ruled by another desire. No matter what apples it may have gathered so long as there is another

apple beyond its reach. Covetousness is never beneficent; it lives for itself; it lives to get, not to give; every appeal only hardens the heart which it was meant to soften. Discontent is the very soul of covetousness, and discontent by its very nature withers everything, and disables its victim from appreciating with satisfaction the very flowers which it holds in his own hand. A contented mind is a continual feast. Discontent is one of the surest proofs of unbelief.

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"Things that are God's."—  
MATT. xxii. 21.

Jesus Christ drew a distinction between the things that are Cæsar's and the things that are God's. Of course all things are God's first and last, yet he allows us to put our names to the immediate possession of some of them. In the Bible two things are expressly claimed for God, but though only two in number they embrace the whole circle and possibility of possession. What are those two things? (1) *Love*. How much are we to love God? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul." Where such a "thing" so vast is God's, what else can be left for others? What we give to God do we not receive back again for distribution amongst our fellow creatures? We may only send up our gifts that they may be sanctified and made fit for social use. (2) *Worship*. As he claims all love, so all worship must be his. "Thou

shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve." Notice the comprehensiveness of the "things that are God's," all "love" and all "worship." Now we return to the question whether anything can be left to be used in other directions? Singularly there are two corresponding demands made in the interests of society. (1) "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." We must always claim the word "neighbour" as intensely Biblical. That word was given to us by the Maker of all. (2) "Honour all men," —thus we get beyond the limited word "neighbour" right out into the general world. "Man" is a larger word than "neighbour," but inasmuch as all men have an interest in the atonement of Jesus Christ, all men are made "neighbours" at the cross. The most noticeable point is that until we love God we cannot love our neighbour, and (2) until we worship God and him only, we cannot "honour all men." True religion, therefore, begins in that which is divine, and where true religion begins, true socialism and philanthropy begin. It is useless to concoct mechanical programmes for the salvation of the world, the work must be radical and internal. Men will never be right with one another until they are right with God.

Love and worship, though so great and so comprehensive, are only a part of a still larger recognition of the "things that are God's." What is the whole number, if we may so say, which includes both

love and worship, and yet goes beyond them in fulness and richness of meaning? That one thing is *Life*. Is our life hidden with God in Christ? When we serve, is it with a heart that willingly stoops to labour? Do we go upon the principle that nothing has been given so long as anything has been withheld? It has been said that "consciences and souls were made to be the Lord's alone." It has pleased God largely to work through the medium of the human conscience. That conscience belongs to God, and to God must give an account. The spirit that is in man, divinely enkindled, must tell him the distinction between right and wrong, and when he sees what is right he must realise it at all costs, offering to God no service which has not the approval of his own conscience.

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#### "Even in Sardis."—REV. iii. 4.

These words, occurring in the course of a general condemnation, are peculiarly suggestive. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." "I have not found thy works perfect before God." "If thou wilt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief." It is in connection with such words that we find the expression, "even in Sardis";—"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." The text will be useful as showing God's view of the worst and feeblest, and opening up some

considerations which should cheer the mind in times of doubt and sadness. What then is the teaching of such an expression ?

I. "Even in Sardis."—THEN IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE TRUE AND FAITHFUL UNDER THE MOST DISCOURAGING CIRCUMSTANCES. The general condition of Sardis was most corrupt. The moral air was poisonous. The name of life was written upon the chambers of death. There was hardly any occasion for hypocrisy, for men gloried in their shame. Yet even in Sardis there were a "few who had not defiled their garments." It is possible, then, for a few to be faithful, even where the majority are sons of Belial. It is something to know this. History thus becomes to us a strong tower to which we may continually resort. "Lives of great men all remind us, we may make our lives sublime." (1) Young man with bad companions. (2) Solitary Christian in household "

II. "Even in Sardis."—THEN EVEN IN THE WORST CONDITION THERE MAY BE SOME REDEEMING FEATURES. Before the flood there was a Noah ; in the cities of the plain there was a Lot ; in the most corrupt times there have been some who have stirred up themselves to take hold upon God. The same thing holds good—(1) in relation to *personal character*—in the worst man there is surely something divine ; (2) in relation to *families* ; (3) in relation to *communities*. Look for the *best* features.

III. "Even in Sardis."—THEN GOD NEVER CONFOUNDS THE GODLY FEW WITH THE UNGODLY MANY. Think of

the profane being in the proportion of a thousand to one ! Is there not a temptation to hurl judgment upon such a community indiscriminately ? Who could have patience to find the one true heart amongst a thousand rebels ?

God does not start his processes from the side of the *wicked*, but from the side of the *good*. Illustrative instances : Abraham and Sodom ; Joseph and Potiphar ; Paul in the storm ; when Jericho perished, Rahab was saved from the common ruin. When the Lord whom we seek shall suddenly come to his temple—the messenger of the covenant who is like refiner's fire and like fuller's soap—they that fear the Lord shall be gathered up like jewels which are above price, and they shall be spared as a man spareth his own son that serveth him (Mal. iii. 11).

With these three general truths before us it is plain that they themselves suggest other truths of equal importance :—

First—If it is possible to be true and faithful under the most discouraging circumstances, what manner of men ought we to be who live under the most favourable conditions ? Where the garden is industriously cultivated, what ought the flowers to be ? Where every possible facility is afforded, what ought the progress to be ? Remember that prosperity has its temptations. Persecution has its noble martyrs. Indulgence has its inglorious suicides.

Second—if in the worst conditions there may be some redeeming features, in the best conditions may

there not be some repulsive deformities?—in personal character?—in family intercourse?—in Church relations?—it ought not to be enough that we are good in the main. We should not rest upon excellencies. There is wisdom in the saying, “No man is stronger than his weakest point.”

Third—If God never confounds the godly few with the ungodly many, neither will the ungodly few escape for the sake of the godly many. God will watch! His own eye will be upon the gate! He will trouble the camp until Achan be cast out. He will send storm upon storm until Jonah be delivered. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.”

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**“Things pertaining to the kingdom.”—Acts i. 3.**

To the Christian mind there is only one kingdom,—the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven. Note that it is a kingdom, not a chaos, not an unrelated gathering of things good enough in themselves, but a gathering of all things lovely and true under the dominion of an Infinite King.

The word “kingdom” properly understood implies Law, Obedience, Authority, Unity. Do not suppose that Christian fellowship means mere sentiment, or even mere human sympathy; it means law and order; and out of these will come liberty and progress.

The crimes which are committed

within a kingdom do not destroy its unity or impair its general reputation. There are prisons and asylums, reformatories and penitentiaries, in all countries, but these do not destroy the political integrity or the international reputation of any land. The prison does not count for so much as the church. Home is still a larger word than asylum. Honesty is a more comprehensive term than bankruptcy. We are at liberty to speak of the health of a nation as being good though every hospital may be crowded.

What are some of the things pertaining to the kingdom? (1) A great body of doctrine, (2) a great spirit of pity, (3) a great law of discipline, (4) a great evidence of growth. The doctrine must always lie at the base of all. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of teaching, education, belief.

What is the effect of having a heavenly kingdom within our present earthly limits? (1) Mental elevation, (2) the right standard of estimate, (3) an invincible spirit of protest against all evil, (4) an unquenchable hope. If we live in a kingdom we live in it as subjects, not as rulers. God is our King. Christ is our one Lord. Christ's word is our one law. Think of the word kingdom as standing in opposition to the word anarchy. There is no confusion in the divine method. God is working out a purpose, and however long the process it will be accomplished in completeness and glory.

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**"Things which cannot be shaken."**—HEB. xii. 27.

The word "cannot" is not in the Greek. The true reading is rather things that are not shaken; things that there is no use attempting to shake; things that are above the rude hand of assault and violence. *Society* is notably one of these things. Anarchy can make but small impressions here and there; it cannot get at the root of the social organism. Faith is not shaken; there are instances in which we speak of faith being overcome, but these are instances only and do not express the general law and the unchangeable fact that faith is the very basis of society and progress. Revolutions are but superficial. The storm is only on the top of the waves. The upsetting wind does not get down to the rocky levels. Suffering does not penetrate to the deepest and inmost temple of spiritual peace. In the study of history always find the point of life that is not shaken. Responsibility is never displaced by irresponsibility. For everything we have to answer back to God. The instinct of life is not shaken. It is something more than selfishness. It is a suggestion of immortality. The true is never shaken. Many assaults have been made upon the Bible, but the doctrine that is revealed cannot be touched by the most eager and destructive criticism. We must take care in defending the Bible to direct our attention to its vital points. A great deal of it is no doubt locally historical, but that fact

does not touch the universal suggestions and revelations of the inspired volume. As the soul may be immortal though in a mortal body, so the spirit of revelation is not shaken whatever differences may be made in the literal construction of the book. The treasure which we hold in earthen vessels is of a different value from the vessels which contain it. The Church is not shaken. Its forms vary, its adaptations are innumerable, its differences may become acute; but through all differences and intellectual hostilities we must find the body of Christ, which cannot be rent, and which is really unaffected amid all human classifications and lines of distinction and opposition. We are told that the body changes its particles every seven years, and yet the body is not shaken; it grows by change; it is renewed by death. Let no man tremble for the ark of the Lord. God has undertaken to preserve that memorial of his own presence in the world of time and space.

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**"Things that accompany salvation."**—HEB. vi. 9.

Salvation is not solitude. The figure is that of a great company, an ever increasing and an ever advancing procession. The "things" accompany salvation not as mere accidents, or casual decorations; they accompany it as the breath accompanies the living body.

Suppose that we had to mark out a list of things that accompany

salvation, we should instantly think of (1) holiness, (2) unselfishness, (3) charity, (4) evangelistic zeal. Where these are wanting we may fairly question the presence of "salvation." If head and hands and face were wanting it would not be difficult to deny that the man himself was present. We must always have our proofs at hand. We must be careful to see that what accompanies salvation is of the nature of the salvation it accompanies. If a number of cripples, blind men, ill-shapen men, were to accompany a captain when he went to the battle we should be at once struck by the incongruity or even the comedy of the situation.

In the Christian life the man must illustrate the doctrine. Many can understand character who take no interest in theology. It is easier for the general people to appreciate a deed of kindness than an argument in metaphysics. We must not be orthodox in dogma and heterodox in life. If a man is as resentful under insult as he was before he professed to be saved he should carefully examine his soul lest he be deceiving himself. To put on Christ is to put off the old man. The fruits of the Spirit are the only acceptable proofs of a spiritual newness of heart. "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away and all things have become new." Salvation goes first, and corroborative deeds follow on. Character must be placed in its right relation and its natural sequence. Good works are not the cause of a

new heart, but its effect. We do not believe because we are moral, we are moral because we truly believe. The faith life has its own beauty, and music, and harmony, and service of love. Sometimes we judge a social personage by the servants which are gathered around him. If they are numerous, capable, orderly, and of good repute, we are entitled to judge that the social personage is himself of a higher quality and a larger influence. So with Jesus Christ and his servants. Servants beware, for in a sense your Master's reputation is in your keeping!

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### "Things offered to idols."— ACTS XXI. 25.

Burke once said, "They have changed the idol, but the idolatry remains." That is exactly the case with present day idols. We throw our idols away and yet we replace them by images still more repulsive. What are some of the idols to which homage is rendered in this nineteenth century of the Christian era? (1) There is the idol of *Appearances*. Vanity will live above its income. Meanest pride will insist upon living in a house in a genteel neighbourhood when it can hardly pay the rent of a dwelling in the humblest locality. The same remark applies to entertainments, dress, equipages, and the whole line of daily action. (2) There is the idol of *Custom*. Men are afraid to break through the conventional. They continue to give intoxicating drinks on various occa-

sions simply on the ground that it is the custom to give them. Some even go to church that they may be in harmony with custom. Every locality has its own peculiar customs through which no one man dare break, though they may be most obnoxious to him. A strong man here and there should lead the way, and there will be many to follow him and thank him. (3) There is the idol of *Superstition*. Some will not sit down to the table where the total number is thirteen. In some houses peacock feathers would not be allowed to enter. Many persons would refuse to be married on a Friday. It would be difficult to get a crew to join a ship that was carrying a dead body. There are scores of such superstitions, all of which weaken the character and utterly misrepresent divine Providence. (4) There is the idol of *Eccentricity*. This is quite as exacting an idol as is its opposite, known by the name of *Custom*. People do things that are peculiar simply because they are peculiar. They are determined not to do as other people do. They make a kind of custom of eccentricity. (5) There is the idol of *Pedantry*. We may pedantically abstain from certain classes of amusement and think we increase our own piety by our Pharisaical abstention. There may even be a pedantry of simplicity—a dress that is very simple, unique, inexpensive, may only be a failure to establish a fashion. An ecclesiastical dress does not always mean the right clothing of the spirit. Men may fast in order

that they may get a reputation for piety. These idols will suggest others. It may even be an idolatry to condemn idols. The heart may be worshipping that meanest of all gods, the non-idol. There is an idol of *Bravado*,—men glory in irreligiousness, in fantastic theories, in heterodox creeds, in defiance of religious habitudes.

We speak with pity or derision of heathen people selling their idols for silver, their gods for pieces of crystal. The derision may be ill-placed and ill-timed. God is bought and sold in Christian countries. When a man stifles conviction that he may increase his income he has repeated the knavery of Judas Iscariot. When a man attends one place of worship instead of another because he can get a reputation for respectability he has sold the very Name which he professes.

The kingdom of Heaven is not in meats and drinks,—it is not in mere habits, ceremonies, observances. Strange as it may appear, a *Creed* may be an idol. When a man has to look at his written creed in order to understand what he believes, the creed is to him an idol. Some people would not know the gospel if they did not hear it from certain men, in certain places, at certain times. The very pew itself may become a species of idol. The only right way is to have the soul filled with the Holy Ghost. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” God has broken up the narrow idolatry of mere place; his temple is the great

**Everywhere,—every mountain is an altar, every valley a sanctuary, every moment an opportunity.**

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**"And these are ancient things."**

—1 CHRON. iv. 22.

All true things are ancient. There is no originality but in adaptation of form. The seven notes of music are ancient, but new hymns and psalms may be made out of them every day. Mere antiquity of *form* may be justly respected because it may represent continuity or conviction, or sympathy, or worship. The respect, however, should be very carefully guarded lest it become a superstition, lest the mere lapse of time should give credit to a lie. True progress is always going backward! That appears to be paradoxical, whereas it is really, simply, and literally true. We must get back to original properties, qualities, authorities, laws. Jesus Christ said that Moses gave a certain law, but "it was not so from the beginning." What we have really to concern ourselves about is the original intention of God. Even laws may be only expedients. Laws are made by men; *Law* was made by God. Never forget that the law is greater than the laws. It is the temporary law that must give place whenever the higher law calls upon it to succumb. Rest is ancient; any day of rest is more modern than rest itself. Faith is ancient; *Creed* is of yesterday. It is not the tune that has to be honoured because it is old,

it is music that has to be honoured because it is from everlasting.

The Atonement was made before the world began. Bethlehem is but a little point of time, a star-glint on the immeasurable heavens. Inspiration is older than the Book which it inspired. God the Spirit is older than God embodied in Jesus Christ. In all things, therefore, our aim should be to get back to God,—through churches, institutions, creeds, historical associations, apostles, and even the historical Christ himself (whom we know no more after the flesh) back to God that God may be all in all. Man was immortal before he was mortal; that is to say in the purpose of God man was meant to be the companion of God. That purpose has been violated by sin, but the purpose itself remains in all its infinite grandeur and tenderness. Let us ever be careful as to the kind of antiquity we are fond of. The real antiquity is God, and whatsoever stands in the way of the development of that antiquity must be distrusted and cast aside.

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**"These are things that I hate, saith the Lord."**—ZECH. viii. 17.

Is the Lord referring to mistaken opinions regarding himself as the supreme mystery? No. Is he referring to imperfect views? Intellectual heterodoxies, or rude conceptions of the Church? No. We must look to the context for the right answer. (1) "Let none of you imagine evil in your heart

against his neighbour." "The Lord looketh upon the heart." There may be no open breach in good neighbourhood, but the heart may be thinking bitter things. God does not ask for neighbourly ceremony, he asks that the heart may be right as between man and man. (2) Love no false oath. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Perjury is a crime against the spirit of righteousness. God will have truth in the inward parts as the only way of establishing right relations of a social and public kind.

In Isaiah the Lord is very definite as to the things which he hates. "I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." It is easy to execute ceremonies when the heart is far away from the oblation.

"Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." These are the things in which insincerity would rejoice because they afford so much room for ostentatious display. God loves simplicity because simplicity is the infallible proof of sincerity. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them." We need never make it a question of casuistry or hair-splitting as to what God hates. We have the answer in our own consciences. If we consider the things which we ourselves would hate if done by others we shall not greatly err in

ascribing the same things to the hatred of God.

Knowing what God hates we may know what God loves. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Throughout the whole Bible it is made clear that God hates the sin and not the sinner. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God hates sin not only because it is an offence against himself but also because it is ruinous to man. The wilful sinner goes down in volume and quality of being day by day. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them." In the midst of all the rebellion and tumult God foresees a time when the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also." Beyond this he sees as it were an army coming to him for the purpose of taking the kingdom of Heaven by gracious violence. "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." Blessed is he who beyond the storm can see the calm. This vision sustained Jesus in his agony. "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. xii. 2).

The Church would have seemed

to have lost the power of true hatred. The tendency now is towards conciliation, and compromise, and concession. This was not the way of the olden time. The apostles and fathers commanded us to abhor that which is evil. The apostle Paul challenges us upon these points with great definiteness and severity. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" Are we permitted to make compromises and to offer terms for a *modus vivendi*? This is the answer: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." If we hate what God hates we shall love what God loves, and that is perfectness of character. But to love what God loves we must have the spirit of God dwelling in us. We must be temples of the Holy Ghost. We must be living sanctuaries of the living God. Mere opinions will stand us in poor stead in the day of conflict. Only the Spirit of right can make us right.

"Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent."—MATT. iv. 17.

I. THE PREACHER. "Jesus began to preach." Jesus was the Son of man and the Son of God. Who, then, can equal him in sympathy and in wisdom? It should be under-

stood that very much depends upon the preacher as well as upon the doctrine preached. The same doctrine is not the same thing as delivered by two different men. A thing must not only be said, it must be well said. As a preacher, Jesus supplied all the great conditions of supreme influence.

First—There was more human nature in Jesus Christ than was ever in any other man. He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,—without that one defilement which impairs and ruins the finest qualities of human nature. Preachers must be intensely human, if they would reach with good effect the hearts of men. They must know much of human experience, much of sorrow, of pain, of temptation, and manifold difficulty. This was pre-eminently and most graciously true of the Saviour-preacher.

Second—There was more intellectual ability and spiritual insight in Jesus Christ than ever distinguished any other preacher. Look at the answers which he gave to cavillers! Look at the keenness of his discrimination as to moral differences,—hypocrisy, falseness, half-heartedness. Look at his love of truth,—simple, pure, eternal truth.

How then will such a preacher proceed with his work?

II. THE SUBJECT of his preaching. That subject was repentance. Hear this marvellous preacher—Repent! This is one of the most solemnly

suggestive words in all human language.

(1) Repent,—then men are in a wrong moral condition. But for this Jesus would never have come! “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”

(2) Repent,—then there is a work which men must do themselves. One man cannot repent for another. See the power and the weakness of human nature in this particular. One man can suffer for another, can pay for another, can work for another, can even die for another,—but never can one man repent for another!

(3) Repent,—then until this special work is done, everything else that is seemingly good is worthless. Men may go far into a certain kind of theological thinking, and yet be profoundly irreligious. We profess to know the truth, but have we repented? The first thing to be done is to put ourselves into a right moral condition. There is an artificial care about religion. What of our hearts? What of our conceptions of sin?

Where all has been so practical, there may be the less need for a formal application of the truth; there are some inferences, however, which ought to be plainly stated.

(1) If Jesus preached repentance, all true preachers will do the same. “Behold, I have given you an example.”

(2) If Jesus urged men to repent, it is certain that repentance is vitally necessary for all mankind.

(3) If repentance is the first act needed, it is vicious and absurd to

attempt to make religious progress without it.

Repentance is not one complete and final act. It may be the exercise of a lifetime. We need to repent every day. Even after our prayers we may have to plead for forgiveness of the sin which has marred their purity. Repentance will not be concluded until death itself has been overthrown.

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“Things new and old.”—MATT. xiii. 52.

Things can only be truly and usefully new in proportion as they are old. This may seem to be fanciful in expression, but it will be found to be literal in fact. Antiquity is the basis of modernness in the degree in which modernness is true in its soul. If we lived in a world of mere novelty and surprise our life would be unsettled and impotent for good. We are secured by the commonplace. Uniqueness itself cannot stand securely on any other foundation. The doctrine is from everlasting; it is only our way of putting it that has the slightest claim to sub-originality. It is personality that is new: it is humanity that is old. Each individual may in his own degree be unique and surprising, but he is only tolerable in the degree in which he represents a common humanity with all its ancient and characteristic instincts. If a man could by any possibility separate himself from the common race he would simply cease to be a man.

The old is the guarantee of the

new. We are only sure of the individual morning because the world has had so long an experience of the development of time. Time is old, mornings are new. And what is time itself but a modern and transient aspect of eternity? When we view existence in its largest relations many things that appear to be great fall into their proper perspective and magnitude. What is measurable time? A thousand years may represent to our consciousness a long duration, but a thousand years are as one day to the Eternal Lord. The lapse of time can make no impression upon eternity. When countless ages have come and gone, eternity will not have begun in any sense that implies the thought that some portion of eternity has been exhausted. That which can begin can also end; eternity is the unbeginning Beginning. The same illustration may be applied to individual men. But it can only be applied, by an almost impossible effort of imagination, to manhood in its totality. Arithmetic has not computed the age of man, but it has graven on tombstones the age of individuals. Every man that lives stands between two immeasurable quantities, the race that is passed and the race that is to come; in other words he is environed by things new and old, and he is profoundly affected by both; he is a debtor to both: what he has received from the one he must pass on to the other.

The thought which is now before us may be fearlessly applied to the historical Christ himself. The Christ

of history is modern but the Godhead is from everlasting to everlasting. The earthly Christ was as the brightest star set in an infinite sky. "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." He was only the Saviour because he was also the Ancient of Days. He was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. He represented and fulfilled an eternal purpose. We shall lose the very spirit of the gospel if we think of Christ only in his historical relations as they were disclosed during his incarnation. We must not reduce Christ to an accident in time. He ought not even to have surprised the world he came to save; nor would he have surprised it if that world had not quenched its original instincts and buried itself in the utterest wickedness. Surprise belongs to unbelief. Expectation is the living joy of faith. All this is true of the cross on which the Saviour died. That cross was modern, a human invention, a very miracle of cruelty, but beyond the cross and above it stands the eternal idea of sacrifice. If we understood any idea of the real nature of God we should know that creation itself is an aspect of sacrifice. *Being* itself is on the part of God an immeasurable condescension. On the human side the cross represents murder; on the divine side the cross represents sacrifice. The human blood represented a divine stream of a higher quality. Man could only see the blood of the body

with the eyes of his body, but with the eyes of his faith he can see the "precious blood," the shedding of which takes away the sin of the world.

The thought is still applicable in other directions; notably in the direction of the Bible. The Bible as a book is quite modern; the Bible as a revelation is as old as God. In the Bible itself, as a sacred book, we have things new and old, the new book, the old revelation. Unless we make a distinction between these things we may fall into bewildering and unsettled confusion. Whatever was written by the human hand must here and there bear the impress of the hand by which it was written. The "treasure" may be from above, but the "vessel" which contains it may be "earthy." As we do not lose the historical Christ by believing in the everlasting God, so we do not lose the revelation because of some things in the letter, "hard to be understood."

This line of thought may be illustrated by the common things that are around us. Life cannot live upon dainties. Not on confections but on bread must the body live. Confections come and go, but bread abides as a staff that may be relied upon. Men cannot live on wine or on fancy drinks of any kind; thirst is only naturally quenched by the common water given for the sustenance of all life. Wine is modern, water is ancient; dainties are the invention of men, bread is the gift of God. The occasional dainty may

be very acceptable, but it is by bread that we must be supported.

Modernness soon becomes a temptation; novelty can only live in surprises. Acquired tastes, and tastes perverted, destroy original appetences. Unhappily this applies also to the very highest concerns of spiritual life. Some minds are driven about by every wind of doctrine. Others are like the waves of the sea, continually in tumult and restlessness. Others are the victims of mere cleverness, not distinguishing between the divine and the human in the preaching of the gospel. Of course we may abuse the true purposes of antiquity. We are not to preserve a wall simply because it is mossy with age: if it has lost its perpendicular, true conservatism demands its reconstruction. The soul cannot find infinite quietness in the new things invented by ambitious conceit, even though that conceit may sometimes put on the fascinating guise of so-called genius. Modernness will best commend itself by its modesty. Youthfulness can never have the authority of old age. Yet youthfulness has a great part to play in the varied ministries of life. It should be welcomed as we welcome the spring, the morning, the first flowers of summer. We should encourage and direct youthful enthusiasm. Darkness may be older than light, but it is appointed of God that light shall scatter all darkness and fill the universe with the brightness of noon tide.

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"Saul made havoc of the Church."—Acts viii. 3.

"Having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead."—Acts xiv. 19.

"YET YE SAY, THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT EQUAL."—Ezek. xviii. 25.

"Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."—Acts ix. 1.

"Certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul."—Acts xxiii. 12.

"YET YE SAY, THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT EQUAL."

"Beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it."—Gal. i. 13.

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep."—2 Cor. xi. 23.

"YET YE SAY, THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT EQUAL."

"Many of the saints did I shut up in prison."—Acts xxvi. 10.

"And when they had laid

many stripes upon Paul, they cast him into prison."—Acts xvi. 23.

"YET YE SAY, THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT EQUAL."

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—Gal. vi. 7.

All these experiences were undergone by the same man : the persecutor was persecuted ; he who shut up others in prison was shut up in prison himself ; he who breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the saints was himself stoned, beaten with rods, and pursued by the vengeance of furious men. What are we taught by such facts ?

I. THAT A MAN'S LIFE COMES BACK UPON HIM.—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." One feels in reading such experience that the sense of justice is satisfied. Suppose that Saul had after his conversion settled down into a state of Christian comfort and enjoyment ; in such a case there would have been a want of moral completeness. Paul himself would have been injured. To have allowed him to wash the blood of the saints off his hands, and to enter upon a course of personal luxury would have been to demoralise human nature. He must reap what he himself had sown ! Such is the severe but beneficent law ! This law keeps things equal. If any man could mingle bitter cups for others, and never be compelled to drain their dregs himself, he would soon

become a devil. God shows him that his turn is coming. Every blow he strikes will be re-delivered upon himself; every pain he inflicts upon others will sting his own heart: every harsh word will come back to him; his mockery, his pitilessness, his selfishness, will return to him, and vex him like a plague commanded of God. All history has shown this. Adonibezek said, "As I have done, so God hath requited me"; Samuel said to Agag, "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." The testimony of holy writ is consistent and emphatic: "He shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy." "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." "The Lord of recompences shall surely requite." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." See how literally and terribly this was fulfilled in the case of Paul. He made havoc of the Church; he persecuted and wasted it; many of the saints did he shut up in prison; his breath was hot with threatening; his hand was heavy upon the Church of God: but turn to his Christian history, and see whether God had forgotten one of his misdemeanours, or allowed one of his own rods to be overlooked! In reading Paul's Christian experience, we feel that justice is satisfied, and that honour is vindicated! "Having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." "And

when they had laid many stripes upon Paul, they cast him into prison." "Five times received I forty stripes save one: thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." It is enough! Justice, spare the rod, for the most terrible of persecutors has received the measure of his own fury!

**II. THAT A MAN'S CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE MUST BE AFFECTED BY THE UNCHRISTIAN LIFE HE HAS LIVED.** This is the most remarkable thing in connection with the subject. One would suppose that after conversion all the former life would be done away. Such is not the case. Physically it is not so; why should it be so spiritually? The man who has physically abused himself will feel the effects of his sin after conversion; old age will come upon him swiftly; his energies will decay before their time; his memory will betray him; and even trivial difficulties will fill him with dismay.

Look at the reasonableness of the doctrine. A man has lived a self-indulgent life; he has been careless of the rights of other people; he has sneered at the piety of his own family, it may be; he has offended

his conscience, and profaned every relation of life. After all this he becomes converted ; is he then to complain of the trials of the Christian way, as if some strange thing had happened unto him ? Were there no old judgments to be satisfied ? Were no old injuries unredressed ? After we have worn out our best powers in the service of evil are we to complain that Christianity is sometimes almost a burden to us and sometimes quite as much a pain as an enjoyment ?

You say that Christian discipline is often severe. What then ? Is there not a cause ? Old neglects have to be made up ; old wrongs have to be avenged ; old wanderings, riotings, and wastes, have to urge their accounts, and insist on settlement. Is not the way of the Lord equal ?

We complain of the arduousness of the Christian way. There are many duties, many trials, many mountains pierced with caverns in which beasts of prey wait the approach of man. What then ? In all this is there not something of our past life ? Was the devil's way easy ? What of the carousals which lasted beyond midnight ? What of the costliness of vicious luxuries ? What of the aching and torment which quickly followed the shameless debauch or the public scandal ? We were selfish, peevish, tyrannical, inconsiderate, defiant, and is it likely that all this can have passed away without leaving deep effects upon our life ? Across our very prayers there will be blown the bitter wind

of the land we lived in so long ; and through our tenderest charities there may be breathed somewhat of the old selfishness which once enclosed us in its prison. Let us, in honesty, trace many of our trials to the life we lived in the flesh rather than to any arbitrariness of divine grace.

In reviewing these statements in the light of history and revelation we see :—

First—That the distribution of penalties is God's work, and not man's. "Vengeance is mine," etc.

Second—That under all the apparent confusion of human life there is a principle of justice.

Third—That the greatest sufferings may be borne with patience and hopefulness. When did Paul complain of his lot ? When did he say that he had suffered more than his share ? From him let us learn "how good a thing it is to suffer and be strong."

#### "God is love."—I JOHN iv. 16.

It may help our clearer view of some mysteries if we hold over them as a lamp this great text. It is difficult for us, in view of many events, which we feel constrained to regard as divine providences, really from our inmost heart to believe that God is love. Take such a text as this : "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Why speak of death to a soul that was but newly born ? Is this the speech of love ? Does it not read like a severe threatening of fatal punishment ? It

may be ignorantly so read. On the other hand it may be read not as a threatening but as a caution, a warning, a revelation of divine solicitude for the creature God had made in his own image and likeness. When you tell your child that it will be burned if it puts its hand in the fire, you are not threatening the child, you are warning it in love. We should beware lest we read some gentle texts in a tone which wholly misses their plaintive music. Take another text : "The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." Is not this the language of vengeance ? Does it not seek to terrorise men by an assertion of tyrannous might ? Certainly not. This also is a loving warning. Men cannot be frightened into virtue. They may indeed be frightened from committing crime, but they can never be scared into prayer and all-surrendering love. It was merciful on the part of God to point out the true consequences of wickedness. God does not allow men to go blindly into perdition. Is it harsh to tell a traveller that if he persist in going along a certain road he will inevitably fall into an abyss ? Is it severe on the part of a friend to point out that a certain cup has been poisoned and that to drink of its contents will surely be to perish ? Wickedness makes its own hell. The burning comes before death. To violate the commandments is to be plunged into unquenchable fire. This text, therefore, is no longer a mystery when we hold above it the assurance that God is love. Take another text :

"It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." The principle of graduated penalty is asserted in this text. God does not deal out his punishment indiscriminately. He knows who lived in the dawn and who has lived in the noonday. We shall be judged according to our opportunities. We shall not be judged according to the light we have, but according to the light which we might have had. The principle of the text is not a principle of vengeance, but a principle of justice, so we may fervently exclaim once more, "God is love." The same interpretation may be given to all such passages ; for example, to such a passage, "Say ye to the wicked it will be ill with him."

As we have read the so-called threatenings, so we may read the sweetest and tenderest promises God. The promises are all conditional. If the righteous man turn from his righteousness he shall surely die. Only he that endureth unto the end shall be saved. Conduct is the guarantee of the fulfilment of divine promises. Obedience opens heaven. Nor is obedience a merely moral legal service; it must come from the heart and express the innermost consent of the will, and such obedience is nothing less than the supreme miracle of the Holy Ghost.

What a strong conception of life do we find in the Bible ! Everything is founded upon reason ; everything harmonises with the spirit of justice ; everything is alive, so to say, with the pity of God,—pity which seeks

night and day to guard the soul lest it should fail of the heavenly end.

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**"I will give."**—GEN. xviii. 8.

God is the One Giver. We have nothing that we do not receive. Take a few illustrative instances: (1) "I will give unto thee. the land" (Gen. xvii. 8). The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. The land was meant for men, for all men, through all time. Out of the land we get our bread. The land lies at the very base of life, and industry, and progress. (2) "I will give thee a son" (Gen. xvii. 16). God is the giver of life. God guarantees the continuity of life. The generations are not only units, they are unities. The great law of succession proceeds from the divine throne. (3) "I will give you rain in due season" (Lev. xxvi. 4). We must not exile God from natural operations. The individual showers are his individual gifts. God associates himself with individual seasons. No detail is too small for the notice of God. (4) "I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour" (2 Chron. i. 12). Thus God is associated with our daily life,—personal, social, commercial, progressive. "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." (5) "I will give you pastors according to mine heart" (Jer. iii. 15). The chief Shepherd appoints the under shepherd. God is pleased to proceed by mediation. He not only works directly, he works

indirectly. The true pastor is a divine creation. Pastors who are self-appointed must fade away.

God so loved the world that he GAVE,—God loves to give. He who has given his Son will not withhold any blessing. The gift of Christ is the pledge and security of all other gifts. What have we to give in return? By the power of the Spirit we may give the love of our hearts; that love God continually desires.

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**"The natural man receiveth not."**—I COR. ii. 14.

There is a law of deprivation. There is also a law of non-receptivity. Some, having eyes, see not; others, having ears, hear not. There is a kind of formal completeness which is a ghastly travesty of manhood. The one-winged eagle flieth not. Everybody can see why such an eagle does not fly. Precisely the same reasoning holds good in the case of the natural man.

Nature cannot read her own parables. Nature is a mystery to herself. The ether has no answer to its own riddle. A cough or the crack of a whip may loosen an avalanche. We are revealed to ourselves only when we are in the darkest afflictions. Joy can no more understand sorrow than June can understand icicles and accumulated snow. We are told that the sun is studied most thoroughly not in the noon tide blaze of splendour but when the mighty orb is shadowed by an eclipse. In that hour of

humiliation, if we may so say, astronomy turns her telescope upon the humbled king. In affliction we see the outline and hear the going of God.

We do not see the divine meaning of morality through natural agencies or through common judgments and comparisons. The true morality is not discerned by the natural man. We get up match sparks of our own and call them glorious. We have even discovered and applied a limelight which makes the ignorant shout in delighted appreciation. But what limelight can stand before the sun? It is just so with our mechanical moralities and natural attempts at discipline and virtue. Looked at apart by themselves they may often be seemly enough and most self-commending; we should judge them not when standing by themselves, but in comparison with the holiness of our Father in heaven. Then we shall see what our dazzling morality is worth! We are not to judge ourselves amongst ourselves or by ourselves; we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

The natural man cannot properly hear a sermon. Hearing is not of the outward ear only. The sermon does not get at the natural man. It hovers about him as a sound, rather than penetrates him as a message. Only when a man becomes a *consenting* hearer is he really profited by spiritual doctrine.

Nature has her own little teachings. In her heart is the spirit of healing. She grows many balms

for the wounds of the life. Ice is her cure for frost-bite. But with all her little economies and management she cannot get at the fatal gash of the heart. She tries to make men better in an outward and mechanical way, for example, causing pleasure to become satiety, and by causing satiety to deepen into disgust. But these things are parables not gospels. There is only one sufficient answer to the cry of the soul—that answer is the redeeming Christ,—and that Christ can only be perceived and received through repentance and faith. If we could see things aright—through a purer and loftier medium than the natural man—we should see many strange and startling issues; we should see that the Crucified becomes the conqueror; that the rejected of men becomes the desire of all nations; that the root out of a dry ground becomes the flower of Jesse; that the cross becomes the crown. But these things are not naturally received. They lie far beyond the line of natural experience in all their highest aspects and purposes. Jesus continually repeats to us the question which he addressed to his first disciples, “How is it that ye do not understand?” The Bible itself is not to be read merely through lexicon and grammar. The Bible is literature, but it is infinitely more, and that infinitely “more” is spiritually discerned. Let us pray for the Spirit. “Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.” “Open thou mine eyes,

that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Discernment is a divine gift. "How is it that ye cannot discern the signs of the times?"

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"Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water."—  
2 KINGS iii. 17.

First get the history well into the mind. Then proceed with the consideration of practical lessons. (1) *Appearances* are not a solid ground of deduction. The appearances may be dead against the prophecy. Appearances are always transient. We should be governed by the soul of prophecy and not by the immediate environment of any situation. (2) It follows, therefore, that *sight* is not the measure either of fact or of possibility. What do we really see? At best do we see more than the surface? We know what it is to be unable to see with the naked eye, and immediately after we know what it is to see with the field glass. In the first instance the side of the mountain seemed to be unpeopled: the field glass revealed herds of chamois, or goats, or flocks of birds. The naked eye brought no report; the assisted eye discerned the true state of affairs. Revelation is the field glass of history. Inspiration enables the mind to see God. (3) The *unexpected* represents the action of Providence. Man is continually rebuked for miscalculating

and misleading expectancy. Expect that the right will be done, that the kingdom of God will surely come, that Jesus Christ shall reign over the whole world, and these expectations shall not be disappointed. (4) False sight may bring the enemy into trouble (ver. 22). The enemy says "Now is our chance," and lo, they discover that they have mistaken the crimson colour, and that consequently they have delivered themselves into the hands of vengeance. Everything may seem to be against the Christian; but nothing can be against him so long as he is true to Christ. Never say all these things are against me. Who can be against us if God is for us? There are times when the prophet is needed (see ver. 11). We need a spiritual ministry, a ministry of interpretation — far-sighted, clear-sighted, and resolute. Present appearances are largely against Christ. Statistically regarded Christ is at the foot of the list; but regarded in the light of revelation Christ already has the heathen for his inheritance. His possessions are secured by the oath of God. The satisfaction of his soul is a divine decree.

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"Things concerning himself."  
—LUKE xxiv. 27.

There is a true egotism. There is also a contemptible egotism. No man was more egotistic than the Apostle Paul. His apologies and his epistles are full of the first personal pronoun. It was a heroic and sub-

lime egotism; the great object of Paul was to use himself and all his experiences as a pedestal for the elevation of the living Christ. The egotism of Christ is an expression of the deity of Christ. Because of what he was in quality, in energy, in fulness, he must of necessity be the subject of his own discourses. (1) He had all resources. He needed not to ask anything of any man. If he asked assistance in this or that ministry it was only that he might multiply himself first by creating that ministry, and second by sustaining it. (2) Christ put forth all claims: "I am the Light of the world; I am the good Shepherd; I am the Vine; take my yoke upon you; follow me; he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Such claims made by a fellow creature would be preposterous. (3) Christ invited the whole world to accept and trust him, and in return he promised the world, in all ages and countries, release from sin, inspiration of heart, and rest from burden-bearing.

What Christ did his Church should do in his blessed Name and infinite strength. The Church is slow to recognise that she, in her own way, is the continuation of an incarnate Christ. When we see the Church we should see at least an outline of the majesty and beauty of her Lord. The preacher, being called and anointed of Christ, claims all themes as the text and starting point of his inspiring discourses. Painters, poets and artists of every name have their respective and characteristic lines

but the true preacher, dwelling in the heart of Christ, has the whole world before him for spiritual interpretation and practical assistance. Life and death, prosperity and adversity, apparent miscarriages of Providence, ever-unfolding and ever mysterious history, pain and tears, guilt and penitence, all invite special messages from heaven. The true preacher is at the baptism of the child, at the wedding of holy love, at the burial of sainted age; he has a psalm, a prophecy, a promise, a balm from Gilead, a song for the night time; in his degree he is filled with all the fulness of God.

When Jesus spake of the things concerning himself he spake of man, sin, atonement, of all the environment of human life, of the complex organism which we call society, of the grave, and of the glorious beyond. There is nothing outside Christ; "By him all things consist."

"A garden that hath no water."—ISAIAH i. 30.

How often it happens that there is one thing wanting: "One thing thou lackest." In the text there is a point of possession, "a garden"; and in the text there is a point of poverty, "no water." What is wanted in all true life is plurality in unity. God, as we have said before, is not a unit, he is a unity. So is every man. So is every true organisation. So is a garden. The text presents a great picture of irony. Imagine the garden, large,

shapely, beautifully planted, rich in roots, but making no progress! Wealth may be poverty. What does the garden need? It needs gracious rain. Take it from the other point. The rain is falling in great showers; falling night and day; but it is falling upon burning sand, or highways paved with rocks, or on acres of swamp and bog. What is wanted? The garden! There are words that seem to go together by a natural necessity; by, indeed, a natural poetry: land and water; heaven and earth; hill and dale; man and woman; parent and child. We may go further and connect two more words without violating either reverence or modesty,—these two words are God and man.

Notice how often we find in human life the disjunction of terms and qualities which ought always to go together. (1) Intellectual capacity, but no spiritual grace; (2) great wealth, but no beneficence, (3) great intelligence, but no power of communication, either from want of sympathy, or want of language, or want of energy. The great ideal is a combination of these. Sometimes the process is reversed: (1) great piety of an emotional kind without corresponding intellectual vitality; (2) great kindness of heart without the means of practical expression; (3) great fluency of speech, but a lamentable dearth of ideas.

In the case both of the garden and the rain natural ministry needs the assistance of human culture. The rain does not shape the garden, does not dress the garden, does not renew

the garden as to root and plant. The garden needs to be cultivated, stocked, tended, pruned, and almost schooled like a little child. So divine inspiration co-operates with human culture in the development of life and character. There is a great common rain which falls upon tree and flower alike, upon rose and vegetable. Yet the common rain does not destroy individuality. So it should be with character; there are great, common gifts of God, but they should fall upon individual genius and will.

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**"Judge nothing before the time."**—I COR. 4, 5.

It is often better not to judge at all, either before the time or after it. We are not called upon to pronounce final opinions upon anything. It is of the very nature of opinion that it should be changeable. Some people are pedantically consistent. They think that by maintaining literal continuity of opinion (which is often a disgrace to any man) they are maintaining consistency of character. It is remarkable that we are nowhere called upon to pronounce final and unchangeable opinions. We are to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to add to our faith, virtue. We are to remember that we know only in part. If any man think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing as it should be known. Remember the great laws of light and shade, changing seasons, ever varying environment, difference

of temperament, and difference of opportunity. Man, who made thee a divider and a judge? We must be careful how we judge the character of other men. We cannot see the whole case. We cannot trace out the mystery of heredity. Prayer is easy to some men, and all but impossible to others. What we think very little of may have cost the possessor many a struggle and many a heartache. It is easy for some men to give, and it is almost impossible for other men to part with money. Let God be Judge. What is said of character may be also said of creed. We are often born into our creeds as we are born into our native language, or into our political constitution. We had nothing to do with making the creeds: perhaps we are utterly unable to criticise the creeds; perhaps we have listened to false interpretations of the creeds: all these things are to be taken into account in judging men's various Christian beliefs. Creeds change, if for no other reason than because words change—change their colour, their relation to other words, their intellectual perspective. We should aim at the increase of faith rather than at the mechanical building of creeds. It is possible for a man to have great faith and no creed; and also to have a formal creed without a living faith.

We are prone to judge and mis-judge one another in the matter of giving and serving. We think men should give more, or do more, where-as if we knew all the circumstances,

we should reverse the opinion. What is giving? One man gives a pound, another gives a farthing, and the farthing may be greater than the pound. What is serving? It is a delight to one man to teach in the school, or visit the sick, or make public speeches. To another man all this kind of service is simply repugnant; but on that account who is to say that he is not serving the Lord after his own gift and method? "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Let us help all we can, and judge as little as possible. We can all do something in sympathy. God is judge. God will render to every man according to his works. We have little to do with judgment, and still less to do with vengeance. Happy is he, because Christ-like, who can leave both to God.

### Christ's over-answers.

Looking at the replies which Jesus Christ made to inquirers, we cannot but be struck with the fact that he often gave them larger answers than they expected. Probably Jesus Christ was never limited by the literal question. He seemed to delight in showing that every inquiry was larger than it seemed to be. He connected the finite with the infinite; the temporal with the eternal. Take instances: (1) when he was asked if it were lawful to

give tribute unto Cæsar, he was not content with Yes, or No, he added, "And unto God the things which be God's." That was not raised in the original inquiry. But this is Christ's way of answering questions, and it is God's way of answering prayer. (2) When Christ was asked which was the great commandment of the law he did not content himself with quoting it; having quoted the first and great commandment of the law, he added, "And the second is like unto it." Many men are interested in theology who are not interested in neighbourliness and social help. (3) When Nicodemus came to speak to Jesus about the miracles, Jesus answered him on an infinitely larger scale than the ruler of the Jews had contemplated. Jesus Christ implied that all the miracles were gathered together in the sublime act of regeneration. Nicodemus wanted to talk about miracles; Jesus talked about the new birth. He always filled up the part that was lacking. That part might be the lesser or greater, but he invariably called attention to it. (4) When Christ was asked whether a man should be forgiven seven times, he made that number look small by declaring that a man should be forgiven seventy times seven, the forgiveness outrunning arithmetic and expressing itself in a symbolic rather than in a literal number. (5) When Jesus was asked about the resurrection and marriage, he gave the great answer that men and women in the future state were neither married nor given in marriage, but were

"as the angels of God." All these answers show the fulness of Christ's nature. They were the replies of completeness, not the struggling and hesitant answers of partial knowledge. He answered as one having authority, and not as the scribes. He put all inquiries into their right atmosphere, and thus answered them on an adequate scale. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Christ gives us more and takes more from us than any mere man could do. He was willing that the poorest should give all they had, and he commanded the rich to sell all and give it away. When he was asked whether there were few that would be saved, he gave the question another turn by saying, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." He rebuked curiosity. He answered the prayers of enlightened earnestness. Never go to Christ for little answers. Be prepared to be astounded by unlooked for and unimaginable revelations of wisdom, and love, and responsibility.

**"How long have I to live?"—  
2 SAM. xix. 34.**

This inquiry may be used rather for accommodation than for exposition. The whole of the little story should be given, and then these particular words may be utilised as an accommodation. This is a useful question for every man to put to himself. In the little time that remained to Barzillai he could find

no enjoyment in eating and drinking, even at the king's table. There are many things in life which are not worth doing because the time is so short. If we could guarantee that our life should be continued for a century, we could arrange our affairs accordingly; but as our breath is in our nostrils, and as no man may boast of to-morrow, it is of infinite importance to regulate our plans in the light of that depressing fact. The meditation upon this text might run somewhat as follows: (1) How long have I to live that I may make the best of what remains? To make the best of an hour is to multiply its opportunities. (2) How long have I to live, that I may set my house in order? We should not leave the world in an unprepared state. Every man has some responsibilities which he should adjust whilst in comparative health. (3) How long have I to live, that I may do the most important things first? There is always an order of importance. To the husbandman it is of more importance at the proper season that he should sow his seed rather than clean his windows. On a ship it is more important to have a qualified captain than a qualified cook. (4) How long have I to live, that I may *pay* all I owe? This inquiry does not relate to money only. We may be solvent in money and insolvent in character. What do we owe to those who love us? To our children? To the poor? To the whole cause of Christ? We are not to buy ourselves off by money: a subscription is not a soul.

What is it to *live*? It is not merely to exist. Men are not bodies only. A man may feed his body and starve his soul. When a man asks questions about his life he should bring them to bear upon his spiritual rather than upon his corporeal nature. There is a mockery of living. We may live without living, that is to say, our life may be only physical, or it may be shallow, or it may be selfish, or it may be running on false lines. The true life is in Christ alone. In every sense he is our life. Unless we are in Christ we have no life. He came to give us life. He complains, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life."

The question may be used in another and most thrilling sense. The question of the text relates only to earthly existence. The Christian preacher has a great answer to the inquiry, How long have I to live? The Christian preacher's answer is, FOR EVER!

**"The man wist not that it was Jesus."**—JOHN V. 13, 15.

The man was healed, and yet he did not know the Healer's name! This is a common fact to-day. Man has a little scheme of bodily healing, but even at the heart of that little scheme there is a divine revelation. In the plant there is healing, and in the mineral. God put the healing forces there that man might discover and apply them. That is all human genius can do; that is to say it can

make use of divine provisions. But human genius did not invent itself. The lamp of genius is kindled at the eternal throne. We think we discovered the telegraph, and in a limited sense that is true, but who created the discovering mind? We should be arrested by the fact that whilst the mind has discovered certain things in nature, the mind neither created itself nor the nature which it explores. Social progress is not a human idea, and, even if human ideas could do much towards its advancement, we are humbled by the reflection that the ideas themselves are not our own.

How did the man come to know Jesus? He knew him through his moral faculty or his spiritual discernment. It is not too much to say that Jesus revealed himself through preaching. He found the man in the temple. He gave him the moral view of the miracle which had been wrought. The moral explained the miraculous. In the case of Jesus Christ the miraculous was always employed to illustrate or assist the moral. Jesus healed the body that he might make a way for himself into the diseased soul. Then the man knew that it was Jesus, and in his own turn the man became a Christian preacher. We often get profoundest explanations of things whilst we tarry reverently in the sanctuary. Only God himself can interpret in all their breadth and colour the common or uncommon events of the day.

The divine ministry which incessantly operates in life is often hidden.

Jacob did not know the angel. Elisha saw the inner circle of things, the servant only saw the palpable environment. Mary did not know that it was Jesus until he introduced the revealing tone into his voice. During the walk to Emmaus the two travellers knew not the man who had joined them and who so fascinated them by his expository discourse. The divine is always at work within our life and round about it. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Nothing happens by chance. God is never taken at a disadvantage. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

We should all offer the great prayer of the man in the text. We should say to Jesus, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" Sight is what we need. We want not only the sight of the body, but that inner, piercing vision which sees the otherwise invisible.

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom."—PROV. x. 23.

The Revised Version has given us the true view of this text by putting it in an antithetic form: what sport is to a fool so is wisdom to a man of understanding. The fool gets his pleasure out of the mischief which he does, and the wise man gets his enjoyment out of the wisdom which he cultivates and increases. As mis-

chief is the sport of the fool, so wisdom is the sport, in the sense of enjoyment, of the man of understanding. Do not imagine that to give up sin is to give up pleasure. That is the very fallacy which the text rebukes. (1) Suppose a man gives up the habit of drinking in which he had found exhilaration. When he abandons the habit, does he deprive himself of pleasure? The text accommodated to such an instance would read thus: it is exhilaration to a fool to drink intoxicants, but what exhilaration is to the fool, inspiration is to a man of understanding. Giving up evil is not a forfeiture of pleasure, it is a preparation for realising the purest joy. (2) Suppose a man gives up a dishonest way of making money, has he on that account given up such joy as prosperity may bring? On the contrary, he gives up uneasy fraud and enters upon honest prosperity. The fraudulent man lives a life of unhappy excitement, always fleeing when no man pursueth; but the honest man lives a life of confidence and repose because he knows that his character cannot be assailed. It is as sport to the thief to increase his possessions by fraud; it is the satisfaction of an honest man to eat honest bread. (3) Suppose a man should give up habits of profanity, is he utterly deprived of pleasure? On the contrary, he exchanges the habit of blasphemy for the habit of devotion. (4) Suppose a man should be living *on* others; if he should be converted from that mean habit, what counter-balancing habit would he form?

Instead of living *on* others he would live *for* others, and in that change he will begin to know a heavenly joy.

Do not think that the Christian life is a joyless life. The fool's pleasures are cheap and shallow. His poor sport ends in no enduring harvest. The fool's poor sport adds nothing to the world's stock of health, or wisdom, or helpful influence. When the fool dies he will be missed only as a foul drain is missed. Let us build in another way. Wisdom means satisfaction. A man of understanding can never be really poor, nor can he ever be really alone in the sense of being orphaned and desolate. Follow wisdom and secure her, for her price is above rubies. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." In the end we shall know who has had the counterfeit pleasure and who has had the pure and inexhaustible joy.

"**No common kindness**"—Acts xxviii. 2 (*Revised*).

Yet the people were pagans! Be thankful for any circumstances that help us to realise our common humanity in spite of clime, or creed, or history. The shipwrecked man does not wait to be saved by a man of his own political party. His one object is to be saved.

The general subject is *quality* of service; not service only, but its distinctive quality. We are not indifferent to quantity, but we regard

quality as essential. Ten tons of timber represent considerable quantity, but one diamond represents a value dependant upon quality. No diamond weighs ten tons, but ten tons may be outweighed by a diamond.

The Christian has no common character. His conduct is not a calculation, a trick, a mode in morals. It expresses the regeneration of the heart. The Christian renders no common service. It is often apparently fanatical, wanting in practical application, dealing with matters that lie beyond the time-line and the space-line. But Christian service does not lie beyond these lines in reality. It deals with the most practical and urgent conditions of life. How are we to account for this uncommonness of character and service? Simply by remembering that we have no common *Saviour*. We partake of the nature or quality of Christ. The branch partakes of the quality of the root.

We ought to make a Christian use of this matter of quality of service. We shall find that the idea of quality pervades the entire spiritual conception. (1) We have no common book. The Bible is unique. It is many books in one. We only read it through that we may begin to read it again in fuller light. We read some books and lay them aside for ever, or take them up occasionally, or use them for ornamental purposes. Other books we use now and then, and feel a kind of intellectual pride that we are able to declare that we have read them. But the Bible is

needed every day, and it becomes more and more to us as our needs increase and deepen. (2) We have no common motive. "The love of Christ constraineth us." We work for Christ's sake. We go at Christ's bidding. Christ is at the very centre of all our thought and action. Where the motive is so sublime there can be no commonness in the service. (3) We have no common reward. The reward is in the working. We realise somewhat of the meaning of heaven on earth. Whatever reward there may be beyond the grave, there is a present and certain reward immediately following all true Christian service.

We owe kindnesses as between man and man apart from country, and politics, and creed. We can all be kind if we cannot be brilliant. The blessing of God is upon the good altogether apart from genius. The epithets which God bestows upon us show how he values Christian service: "Well done, good and faithful servant"; not mighty and brilliant, not rich and famous, but good and faithful—terms within the reach of child and peasant and king.

"I am not better than my fathers." — I KINGS xix. 4.

It takes a man a long time to come to this conclusion. The first idea that occurs to a young man is that his fathers were totally unequal to the occasion, and that the world has been waiting for him. Elijah, at the moment of the text, presents

a very instructive spectacle. In him we see the ambitions of life quenched; in him we see the disappointments of life culminating in self-humiliation; in him we see the depressions of life in their deepest depth. The man had run away from his work. He who had expected to do great things bitterly reproached himself for having done next to nothing.

In this estimate of himself Elijah committed two mistakes: (1) he set up a *false standard*; he measured everything by personal consideration. A man cannot see far into the real meaning of things if he has no clearer medium of inspection and inquiry than the first personal pronoun singular. His disposition may be good, but his medium is insufficient. (2) Elijah not only set up a false standard, he conducted a *false comparison*. He spoke only of his "fathers." The standard was human. There is not a single reference in this bitter complaint to a divine personality or a divine purpose. "I" has its place; "my fathers" have their place, but they are not to be so treated as to exclude the purpose of God. Not what I can do, but what God can enable me to do is the true standard of measurement. Not what "my fathers" have done, but what God means age after age to do is the true inquiry.

Discouragements and disappointments have their special ministry in human training. "Some days must be dark and dreary." Discouragements may drive us nearer God. Disappointments may chasten our self-esteem. God is very pitiful to

us in the extremity of our distress. Instead of hurling his thunder upon us, he sends through our hearts the reviving music of "a still small voice." It is very instructive to notice that one of the grandest heroes in history was made afraid by the fret of a woman. We may run to God without running from our work. Never let us fly to immeasurable Nothingness, but let us fly to the infinite Sufficiency in the time of fear and conscious weakness.

### Obedience.

This text will be found in many places in the Bible. Any one of them will do as a starting-point. We all think we know the meaning of obedience, whereas, in reality, the meaning is hardly known to a single soul. If we look at an etymological dictionary for the meaning of the word obedience, we shall be referred to the word audience. (1) Attentive listening is the first condition of obedience. If we do not listen well we cannot hear well. We must listen for minor notes as well as for major. Few men can listen. Whilst we are professedly listening we may be really holding conference with ourselves. (2) Another meaning of obedience is "to be put under,"—to be subordinated,—to be subjected. The hearer must be subject to the speaker. The scholar must put himself under the teacher. Soldiers are to have no voice in the arrangement of the battle,—"theirs not to reason why."

As Christians we are called unto obedience. (1) We do not live on self-discovered truth, "What have we that we have not received?" We must not think of the commandments being delivered to us, we must rather think of ourselves as being delivered over to the commandments. (2) We are not masters, we are slaves. We are slaves by *consent*, and therefore we are true, free men. Jesus Christ is our master, and our relation to him should be one of simple and unreserved obedience. Two things are notable in relation to the Mastership of Jesus. (a) Jesus Christ never asked us to aid him in the statement of doctrine. We are not partners in the great revelation. We are receivers only. (b) Jesus Christ never asked us to pray for him. Paul requested prayers on his own behalf, but Jesus Christ never did. If he could have done so, he would have denied his own deity. (3) We are under oath to Christ. We are shut up as within a fence. We have promised him our whole heart, and we may not go astray even for a moment.

Obedience is an essential condition of rest. Rest never comes along the line of tumult, anarchy, or self-assertion. It is meekness that inherits the earth. It is the lover of peace who is lifted up beyond the fury of war. There is a rest that follows weariness, but this is the lowest quality of rest. The rest that follows completion is the true peace. The artist does not rest because he is tired; he rests because his work is finished. When God

had finished the heavens and the earth he rested. Omnipotence cannot be fatigued; yet in the sense of completion omnipotence can rest.

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**"Sow not among thorns."**—  
JER. iv. 3.

(1) Do not waste *labour*. "Answer not a fool according to his folly." Why try to gather figs where there are only thorns and thistles? Why attempt to cut iron with glass? Why endeavour to thwart gravitation by the action of mechanics? Why try to empty the Ganges with a salt spoon? These questions all point to the absurd waste which some men make of their lives.

(2) Do not waste *talent*. "Cast not your pearls before swine." What preacher can address a sleeping audience? What man can be eloquent in attempting to persuade a lunatic? Who does not see the absurdity of taking pictures to an asylum for the blind? Who would count it wise to spend his time in playing the organ to men who are totally deaf? Talent is doubled by spending it well. The sower is rewarded when he sees first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Waste never creates gladness.

(3) Do not waste *thought*. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs." Many people do not live in the realm of thought; they live roughly and incoherently in the market-place of action. The mathe-

matician does not explain the mathematics of the bridge to the labourer who moulds the iron or the labourer who carries the mortar. Their work is useful enough, but they are not in a mental condition to discuss mathematical problems. The mathematician would find that he had been speaking a language not one word of which was comprehended. Study the people you have to deal with. Talk to them in their own language. This applies to preaching and to every department of elementary and advanced education.

(4) Do not waste *character*. Here the word waste is used in a different sense. A noble character can hardly be lost wherever it is lived. There is an influence far beyond word and deed which no calculation can completely follow. Do not waste your own character. Do not fritter away your talents. Cultivate a kind of character which makes itself useful to other men. What is the use of your character for learning if you never teach either child or man? Character should be regarded as an investment, the profits of which are for social use.

From things not to do we may learn what things to do. (a) Sow on good ground; (b) live with the wise; (c) give only to those who can receive,—not with the hand, but with the mind; (d) discriminate between dogs and men.

Thus we see that the Bible is a handbook of *practical* principles. It guides us in the common work of the day. The Bible is also what may be called a labour-saving

directory. It shows you how time and money, and strength and influence may be thrown away. No man can get far wrong in the business of daily life who studies the Sermon on the Mount concurrently with the Book of Proverbs.

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### Balanced days.

It is most instructive to see how one day is set over against another in the whole course of Biblical teaching. Take examples. (1) The day of *trespass*,—"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The day of trespass is balanced by the day of *judgment*,—"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (2) The day of *service*,—"Are there not twelve hours in the day?" The day of service is balanced by the day of *rest*,—"There remaineth a rest to the people of God." (3) The day of *opportunity*,—"This thy day." The day of opportunity is balanced by the day of *despair*,—"Now they are hid from thine eyes." (4) The day of *salvation*,—"This is the day of salvation." The day of salvation is balanced by the day of *exclusion*,—"Many will say to me in that day." (5) The day of battle is balanced in the experience of the Christian by the day of victory. "If we suffer we shall also reign with him." In looking at our life we must set one thing over against the other, as God has done; notably we must set one day over another. There are days of rain and there are days of sunshine. When we are in night

we must think of the coming day ; when we are enjoying the splendours of noon our spirits must be chastened by remembering that the evening shades are gathering and will be upon us in due time. The wicked has his day ; but the day of the wicked is short. The candle of the hypocrite shall be blown out. The day of temptation falls upon us all, but it never comes without bringing with it memories of the great conquest won in the wilderness. In the day of prosperity be wise ; in the day of adversity consider. I must work to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

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**"Not one too strong."**—DEUT.  
ii. 36.

Give the history in which these words are found, and for practical application come to our own final report of our encounters, and losses, and gains. We should raise the question, "What are the cities which we have to take ?" Every man must live the soldier's life. He makes a fatal mistake who associates life with indolence or enjoyment, or who flees away from human cries of need or pain. (1) One man has to overcome the city of drink. He is cursed with burning thirst. He would give all he has in the world for the bottle out of which he drinks his death. It has been abundantly shown that even this fearful appetite can be subdued and extinguished. Let no man despair. Reason should be

mightier than appetite. (2) Another man has to subdue the city of ill-gotten wealth. His life has been a lie. He has risen up from sleep to continue his frauds, and he has gone to rest that he might dream of bigger plunder. We should live in the city of honesty. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." We must have a new definition of wealth. He is rich who lives in God. He can never be poor who eats the bread of honest endeavour. (3) One of the greatest cities to take is our own spirit. Look up the passages referring to this in the Book of Proverbs. He that ruleth his own spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city. As obedience is the first qualification for government, so self-control is the strongest guarantee for the meeting out of justice to others. A poor conqueror is he who has thrown down fortifications of stone and left standing in his own person fortifications of obstinacy, self-will, passion, and determination to get wealth, whatever may become of righteousness and love. The report of those who have done most for God is a report full of encouragement. Notice the report which is given in the text. This is not the tone of despair. The Church should never allow itself to think that any city or any giant is too strong for its strength. In climbing mountains we get health. In fighting with the strong we increase our own strength. "Our sufficiency is of God." "The battle is not your's, but God's." "If God be for us, who can be against

us?" "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him." One man slew an army with an ox-goad. Other men blew down the walls of a city by using ram's horns. There is no city within the man or outside of the man which God cannot overthrow. Let the Church to her knees, that she may know how to wrestle with giants and trample their strength in the dust.

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"I have severed you from other people."—LEV. xx. 26.

The principle of separation runs all through life. It is important to remember this, lest we should suppose that God was influenced by mere partiality. Our friends do not all stand on the same level. We may be friendly to all men, yet we have an inner circle where our hearts find rest in confidence and love.—We have our favourite authors; among poets we may have a favourite poet; among artists we recognise those who have a special charm for us.—This is the secret of patriotism. We sever one country from another. In itself one country may not be better than another, but there are instincts which gather themselves up into patriotic preferences. It is no mere commonplace to say that a man can have only one native land; it is not only true as a fact, it is also true as a sentiment.

What applies to a country applies also to a faith. Not where Christianity agrees with other religions, but where it differs from them its power begins. We should have great respect for all faiths, and never seek to displace them unless we can put a better in their stead.

(1) God himself, as we know him in the Bible, is severed from all other gods. He challenges other gods to comparison. He will not share human confidence with any other god; he must have the heart in its entirety.

(2) Advantages are not monopolies, but trusts. God did not choose the Jews that he might reject the Gentiles; he elected the Jews as the medium, or instrumentality, through which he would get at all other nations. Strength is held for the weak; intelligence is held for the ignorant; wealth is held for the poor. Divine election is abused when it is turned into a monopoly, or into a reason for sneering at people of other lands and creeds. Christ chose his twelve disciples not that they should remain twelve, but that they should go out and convert the world.

(3) Christianity does not drag itself down to other conditions, it raises other conditions to its own level. See how wonderfully this is illustrated in foreign missions. It is not Christianity that goes down, it is the heathen idol that is overthrown.

(4) The difference being one of quality, the higher the quality the less boasting. The Jews as a body did not understand this, and there-

fore they undervalued, or even contemned, the whole outside world.

(5) The severance is not one of manners, but of spirit, motive, purpose. Christianity is not pedantic, it is regenerative and spiritual. We are not to hide ourselves behind high walls, and thus limit the grace of God. We are to be in the world, yet not of it. Jesus Christ ate with publicans and sinners, yet the severance between himself and them amounted to a vital separation. Christianity gives no countenance to monasticism. It is a poor religion that cannot bear the fresh air. It is not a religion at all, but a vapid sentiment that cannot go out into the market-place and sanctify so-called secular occupations.

**"But when it is grown."**--  
MATT. xiii. 32.

Not what a thing is at the beginning, but what it is at the end shows its real quality and character. Apparent simplicity may end in great complexity. The devil often begins with easy accommodations to circumstances and characteristics. Jesus Christ is here speaking of a grain of mustard seed; which is the smallest among seeds, then he adds, "But when it is grown." The principle of the text applies to good things and bad things alike. As to bad things it applies to little acts of selfishness, so small at the beginning as to be hardly noticeable, but when they are "grown" they become very stubborn habits. Some men may

only be at the point of sneering at little religious formalities, but when the sneer is "grown" it may become a great rebellion against divine Providence. Young people should be careful as to the habits they form in the matter of eating and drinking, in the culture of personal discipline, in the companionships which they elect, and, indeed, along the whole line of human life.

As to the application of the text to good things see (1) how it works in love, (2) in self-sacrifice, (3) in prayer, which may have a humble beginning, being at the first little more than a stammer or a sob, but when it is "grown" it may become deep and loving communion with God.

The kingdom of heaven grows. In the context it is compared to a seed that opens, enlarges, and fructifies as a great tree. We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Collate the passages in the New Testament containing exhortations of growth and advancement.

The kingdom of heaven must be not only as seed, but as seed sown. Seed is in the wrong place when it is locked up in a drawer or when it is hotly grasped by the hand. We are to sow our seed in the morning. We are to look for the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. The infant is not to live for ever in a cradle. An ungrown child would be regarded as a curiosity or a monster; what shall be said, then, of an ungrown soul?

If the kingdom of heaven is come

parable to seed sown, we must give it time for development. There is a law of progress. The husbandman hath long patience. We do not sow seed at night and gather the harvest in the morning. The times in history in which nothing appears to be done may not be unfruitful times.

As we have to wait for the harvest in morals as well as in crops, we must not give final judgments at intermediate points. The final judgment must be reserved for the very end of things. It is unsafe to predict the end from the middle. Things must often grow together until the harvest, and we must never cease to remember that not man, but God, is the Judge.

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### Apostolic benedictions.

Look at the various forms of benedictions employed at the beginning and ending of the epistles. Read them to the people in a series, then take the following notes:—

(1) They are not mere courtesies or compliments without special religious meaning: they indicate the soul of the writer; they show the atmosphere in which he did his work.

(2) All the persons in the Godhead are invoked. They are all needed, whether specifically named or not. They are all needed, for they lived to bless and help and complete humanity.

(3) All are aspirations for the truest kind of heavenly communia-

cation. They desire communion: they pray for comfort: they invoke the spirit of peace.

These blessings never terminate in themselves. Whoever receives these benedictions receives along with them Inspiration, Strength, power to Serve, the stimulus of Hope.

(4) All the blessings are for definite *characters*,—saints, brethren, Church. Not because a man is in the visible community, but because his soul is in the invisible Church are blessings invoked upon him, and are blessings conferred upon him.

(5) The benedictions refer to permanent necessities. They can be recited to-day with as much propriety as when they were first used. They indicate no local custom; they are appropriate to every clime and every age.

Are we in the enjoyment of these blessings? If not, why not? “Lord, evermore give us this bread.”

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“For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.”—Rom. i. 1.

(1) A great *feeling*,—“I long to see you.” This indicates sympathy, solicitude, kinship. The Apostle was not a mere hireling. Invalids long for the sunshine; shepherds long for the flock; the parent longs for the child; so the Apostle longed for his brethren in Christ.

(2) A great *generosity*,—“that I may impart to you some spiritual

gift." Whatever the Apostle had he held in trust for others. Paul was never in spiritual destitution. He said he was a debtor to the Greek, and to the barbarian, that is, he longed to pay them what Christ had already given him. The Church, like her Lord, should live to give.

(3) A great *purpose*,—"to the end ye may be established. The Apostle was a great builder, Paul believed in strong work. He cautioned the Churches against bad workmanship. Even when the foundation was right he told men to be very careful as to the material and quality of their building.

(4) A great *desire*,—"that I may be comforted." There is a wonderful interchange of help in Christian service. In helping others the soul helps itself. He that watereth shall himself be watered. We always get good by doing good. If men worked more they would complain less. Service is the secret of happiness.

(5) A great *co-operation*,—"by the mutual faith both of you and me" We complement each other's faith. There may be something like an average in the faith of the Church. He who has much faith will help the man who has little faith.

The idea of such salutations is that there is no official priesthood,—there is no sacred class. There is a passage to this effect, "Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." This is often mis-read. The word should be "in," not "over." The Apostles recognised themselves as belonging to a

common membership with the people. They were elder brothers. They could only be over the Church in the sense in which they were in it. Affection, intelligence, insight, sympathy, will always rise to a natural primacy. We only hold the personal for the benefit of the social. All that Paul had he held as a trustee for others. Each of us can do something or give something. Each of us can impart some spiritual gift.

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"I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman."—JER. vi. 2.

Life may be looked at ideally as well as literally. Here is the work of the poet. He sees all things at their best; they only come to him in bloom, and music, and light. Do not suppose that the poet is romantic or extravagant; it is the literalist who is narrow and often foolish. Nature says one thing to the poet, and another to the clodhopper. So does man: the poet does not look at the sordid and degraded part of man, he looks at man as he imagines him to be in the purpose and thought of God. So also with the Church. It is perfectly possible to taunt and condemn the Church as a gathering of very rude materials, quite a grotesque accumulation of oddities; but this would not be the Church as Christ viewed it, and ought not to be the Church as holy men regard it. The Church is within the Church. The comely woman is within the

rags which she may have been doomed to wear. The flower is already in the root. This idea may be applied to the State; to woman; to childhood; to the family; to the home.

To see what the ideal may become read from verse 7 to verse 15. It is the same woman that is spoken of. Our ideal beauty is the measure of our degradation. A dog cannot fall so low as a man, for there is not so much in him to fall. The great cathedral can be more degraded than the dog kennel. The highest trees have the deepest shadows in the lake.

The contrast between the ideal and the actual may be unjust. It is easy to mock human infirmity. Many persons stimulate their malice by endeavouring to find inconsistency in human conduct. They compare the prayer and the life. The foolish cannot be restrained in their mockery. They are easily led to blame the faith instead of the believer—the Christ instead of the Christian.

This chapter has two points which remind us of the New Testament—‘I have likened’—and in verse 16 we have the remarkable words, “Ye shall find rest for your souls.” In these two passages it would seem as if Christ were talking in the prophecies of Jeremiah. Is he not talking in all the prophecies? Is he not talking through all the prophets? Properly read, the Old Testament always leads to the New, and, indeed, makes the New a necessity.

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### Christ's view of little things.

Little congregations,—“Where two or three are gathered together.” Little lives,—“One of these little ones.” Little helps,—“A cup of cold water only.” Little gifts,—“Two mites.” Little relatives,—“The *least* of these my brethren.”

“Suffer the little children to come unto me.” How greatly is the passage beautified and softened by the word ‘little!’ Is not this God’s way as it was Christ’s? Do not God and his Son always move on the same level? We have seen what Christ said about little things, now recall what the Father teaches: “Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father”—the bird’s nest in the ground was not to be trodden upon. Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered; he calls every steward to account. He orders the fragments to be gathered up; he wants to know what has become of the one talent as well as the five; he knows our down-sitting and our uprising; he is round about the tabernacle of all them that fear him. There is nothing too little to name to him in prayer. He does not pledge himself to answer all our prayers, but he will always answer the prayer, “Thy will be done.”

There is nothing to wonder at in universal dominion in majesty, in glory, in providence over planets and constellations. But this is far from being all, think of the minute scrutinies and cares! Think of the greatness of God as something more

than mere bulk. There is a greatness of mercy as well as a greatness of power. God is great in love, great in patience, great in tenderness ; he will not suffer one of the hundred sheep to be lost.

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### "I don't know."

This is one aspect of agnosticism. It can be shown that in all practical matters there is an agnosticism which the religious agnostic absolutely ignores. The agnostic is not consistent with his own view of things. He says God is not only unknown, but unknowable. The same thing can be said in directions which the agnostic pursues without a misgiving. There are many things about which a man may say, "I don't know," for example :—

(1) I don't know how long I may live, yet I am prolonging the lease of my house ; I am sowing seed for next year ; I am making investments that are to bear fruit in ten years.

(2) I don't know how long this little child may live ; yet I am educating it as if it were going to live the full term of human life. It may die to-morrow, yet I am taking a place for it on a list of candidates for admission to a great public school. I don't know where the child came from, yet I have received it as a blessing and a trust. I don't know whether the child may live in an English speaking country, yet I am training the child in a thorough knowledge of the English language.

(3) I don't know how long I may

retain my reasoning faculties. The brain may suddenly collapse. Some great delusion may depose and overwhelm my judgment, yet I am using my reasoning faculties, and accepting responsibilities, and entering into solemn social relations, as if my reasoning powers would never give way.

(4) I don't know how long the nation may be unassailed, yet I am building houses, and investing in the national funds, and putting perfect faith in the national honour.

There are three things we cannot get rid of: (a) Contingency. We do not know every element and every force in any set of circumstances, therefore, we operate upon probabilities and assumptions whose course we cannot critically calculate. (b) We cannot get rid of the higher consciousness ; we may discourage it ; we may try to ignore it ; we may regard it as in some sense mere sentiment ; but there it is, a positive and energetic factor in our whole life. (c) We cannot get rid of the Future. The future is as mysterious, as unknown, and as unknowable as God. Who can tell what a day may bring forth ! What is speculation but educated guessing ? Who knows on retiring to rest if he will ever open his eyes in life ?

The point is that though many things in actual life are unknown and unknowable we yet operate upon a certain positive conception ; and are willing to be directed and encouraged by the invisible spirit of hope.

Apply all this to Christianity, and

indeed to the entire religious idea. I do not know who wrote the Bible, yet I cannot read it without feeling that it is profitable for doctrine, for instruction, and for the highest culture of life. I cannot see God, and it is the Bible itself that tells me so. The Bible has its own agnosticism. We must not allow for a moment that agnosticism is something wholly outside the Bible. "No man hath seen God at any time." "God is great and we know him not." "Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Christianity asks us to try it; to put it to test in daily life; Christianity, like its Founder, is willing to be tested by its "works."

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### Great Omissions.

It is wonderful how many things Jesus Christ, according to the written account, omitted from his teaching. What great omissions, we observe, for example, in the Lord's prayer. Nothing is said about kings; nothing is said about warriors; no desire is expressed for the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. No petition is offered for spiritual enlightenment. Nations are not specifically referred to. Compare any comprehensive prayer to-day with the form known as the Lord's prayer and see into what detail the former enters. Yet may not the omissions be rather apparent than real? When we pray for the coming of the Divine Kingdom, do we not pray for nations and kings? When we pray for the universal

prevalence of the Divine Will, are we not praying for the highest spiritual blessings? When we pray for Divine forgiveness, are we not confessing sin?

How many omissions we may note in the Sermon on the Mount. Is the word "sin" ever named in that discourse? Is the word "sacrifice" ever mentioned by the Preacher? Is the doctrine of immortality stated as an encouragement to good works? Would any one suppose from the Sermon on the Mount that the salvation of the world is wrought by the cross of Christ? Let us be careful how we answer these questions, for many doctrines may be implied rather than expressed, and apart from the assumption of such doctrines the whole sermon would have been an impossibility. If we try to follow the legalism of Jesus we soon come upon the ministry of his grace. There is not a duty commanded in the Sermon on the Mount that can be done spiritually, and in all its best expressiveness, apart from the cross of Christ.

There are great omissions in the Ten Commandments. Nothing is said about the Church, nothing is said about the State, there is no political allusion in the whole decalogue. Children, and servants, and cattle, are the subjects of commandment; but where is our duty to kings, or our duty to evangelise the world, and where are we required to enter into the sacrifice and enjoyment of communion with God in prayer? Let us be careful, I repeat, lest we overlook the implications of

some terms. A wonderful study is the implication of great words. The word "creation" implies the act "redemption." Providence is the outward and visible sign of the spiritual mystery of salvation. When Christ healed the body, the implication was that he was ready to heal the soul.

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"Your little ones . . . shall go in thither . . . and they shall possess it."—DEUT. i. 39.

God talks about all time. He provided for the entire future. In his forecast of the coming ages he assumes his own eternity. There is no future to God. A great argument for the unity of creation might be founded upon the divine sovereignty of the future. (1) There is a great *line* in history. All things tend to one grand issue. The line may be momentarily broken, but only momentarily. What we call upheavals may be only God's way of making connections. Revolutions are the punctuation of the divine literature. There may be many side paths, but the central road is one, and it runs right through all levels, hill, and dale, and every climate, to the city of the divine purpose. (2) There is a great *hope* in history. The word "shall" indicates certainty of issue. The provision for the little ones means the continuity of history. The world was not made for any one generation, or for any one class; it was made for the sum total of mankind. (3) There is a great *God*

in history. That is the explanation of all. We see details, and aspects, and transient phases of the divine government, but the throne of God abides in all the completeness and glory of infinite power.

(a) The little of to-day are the great of to-morrow. (b) Our blunders are the education of our children. Our experience is part of the wealth we leave them. (c) The enemies of God are only preparing for themselves a greater overthrow. The higher the tower the greater its fall. We may think we are prevailing against God, when we are only digging a pit for ourselves.

God always addresses the world in a spirit of hope. We should learn to do the same. Tell young men that great things are expected of them. Tell weary men that they have a reserve of strength and may draw upon it. Tell the learner that every mistake he makes may be a preparation for the better execution of the next task. Tell the sick man that though the outward framework may perish, he will be healed with the health of immortality. Do not discourage the children because their parents have been unfaithful or unwise.

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"Sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—ISAIAH xxxv. 10.

They shall become obsolete words, having first become obsolete facts. Explain the meaning of the word "obsolete." Show how some words have passed out of use. Show that the

time is coming when such words as "pain," "sorrow," "jealousy," "sighing," "sin," will be absolutely lost to human memory. New words will supersede old terms. Instead of such words as we have now given, there shall come up such words as "love," "holiness," "peace," "joy," "hope."

Construct a sentence made up of obsolete English words. By this illustration show that there shall be

a similar obsolescence in religious or spiritual phraseology. Construct a sentence full of such words as "pain," "sin," "misery," "heart-break," and take that sentence to men who have been in heaven for a century and ask them to read it. They could not! The things signified having passed away, the signs which represented them have also perished.

## AD CLERUM.

MY friends have been good enough to describe me as "a preacher to preachers," in the sense, I suppose, that they have found some of my suggestions useful in the framing of sermons. I covet no higher honour, especially as I recall the time when I pored with delight over certain books which were written for the encouragement of preachers. I recall with vividness three periods in my evolution as a preacher: (1) the period when I revelled in climaxes and in general verbal thunder—a very young and untrustworthy experience; (2) the period when I began to think more of the thing said than the way of saying it—a very distinct advance; (3) the period when I clearly saw that I have not to invent a gospel, but to preach one.

I think that most of the foregoing sermons will show that the last period has largely ruled my thought and my method. I have noticed, during a good part of my pulpit life, that the expository and experimental method of preaching best maintains public confidence and best promotes public edification. Merely intellectual qualification has hardly ever long maintained an interested audience. Something more even than scholarship is needed in the exposition of the Scriptures. That something more is spiritual sympathy and insight. This cannot be taught in the schools. This constitutes the very gift and calling

of God. The people will testify accordingly. How deeply true it is that "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." The people know what heals the heart and what redeems the life from despair.

Some writers, of the highest Christian standing, have brought themselves to look upon the Bible as a book obviously marked by incongruity, self-contradiction, historical impossibility, and occasional moral outrage, in which, nevertheless, many a direct and genuine message from God may be found if sought for with a reverent, humble, and obedient spirit. Such writers, regarded as a class, declinie, with an energy hardly less than vehement, to speak of the Bible as "the word of God," yet, happily, they are equally emphatic and fervid in declaring that in ancient times the word of God came to individual prophets and suppliants, and that a record of the communication is to be found in the Bible. The writers in question go much farther than this, their urgent contention being that the word of God not only *came*, but that it *comes*, is coming, has always been coming, and that as a gracious necessity of spiritual progress it will always come to living and holy souls. It is important, even at the risk of verbal tediousness, to make this clear, because, differ from them or agree with them, we are dealing with friends and allies who are spending their lives in the exposition and propagation of their own view of "the truth as it is in Jesus," and whose holy zeal warms and stimulates the whole action of the Christian Church. We are dealing with brethren, not with enemies, with believers, not with infidels, and with men whose conception of the case may some day prove itself to be right. It is a worthless orthodoxy that cannot stand the

test of all fair criticism, and it must be a superstitious and faithless faith that conceals its credentials in fear of their possible invalidation. On all sides of these great inquiries we are in quest of truth. We want to get down to the rock of reality. We desire, however much we may be unable to agree in intellectual opinions, to realise the presence of that blessed Paraclete—God the Holy Ghost—whose office it is to guide the meek and the faithful into all truth. The brethren whose theory I am about to consider, and in parts strongly to oppose, are of opinion that no little harm has been done to the Bible itself by claiming that as a book it is “the word of God.” They wish the Bible to be properly defined. They regard it not as *being*, but as *containing*, the word of God. They are not afraid to say that the Bible as a book abounds in errors, that some of the authorships are nominally fictitious, that many of its dates are incorrect, that some of its books are of composite and not of individual authorship, that Moses may have written little or none of the books which bear his name, and that David may never have heard of the Psalms which are ascribed to his harp and pen. Yet they claim that humble and obedient souls may find “the word of God” in the Bible, but not in the Bible alone, for that word, they say, comes to men every day as a distinct and direct message from God. Every day brings its own message. That may be so. Certainly this view does not discredit or limit inspiration. On the contrary, it insists upon the fact, and worthily magnifies its value. But the view must not be regarded as original. It must not be supposed that some man discovered it yesterday. It is a view for which other men have suffered. Young men are now gaining applause for saying that for which older men suffered social and professional martyrdom. The least

such young men can do is to acknowledge the wisdom and courage of their forerunners. In discrediting the value of second-hand learning we should take great pains to escape the humiliation of second-hand originality. Gratitude never disgraces genius.

It has been said by writers whose view I am about to consider that the Bible itself nowhere claims to be "the word of God." Very much is made of this point. It is said there is no foundation in the Bible itself for the common practice of speaking of it as the word of God. "Boldly challenge those who thoughtlessly employ the term." Who are they? I would first inquire. The word "thoughtlessly" sets up a prejudice. It is misplaced. Having regard to the whole history of the Church, it may be unjust and impertinent, certainly it cannot assist in the elucidation of the argument. A man is not necessarily "thoughtless" because he differs from me. He may be only modifying my omniscience. If the Bible nowhere claims to be "the word of God," and if the absence of a claim is equivalent to the absence of a right, we must carefully consider the issues. Suppose the Bible does not claim to be the word of God, what then? Is it not, therefore, the word of God? May it not be all the more the word of God on that very account? Does the Bible ever claim to be a book at all? Then it is not a book. Does the Bible ever claim to be a unit? Then it is not a unit. If the Bible is only what it claims to be, then what is it? Does it make *any* claim? Is it, to speak figuratively, at all conscious of its own existence? Besides, if inspiration comes daily, if it is always with us, if "we may find truth flowing towards us like the dayspring from the dewy eyelids of the morning," if all this is really a fact, who is able to say that inspiration may not be retrospective as

well as prospective? that it may not claim for the Bible what the Bible does not formally claim for itself? that it may not inspire its readers as certainly as it inspired its writers? It is not for us to dogmatise. Possibly God may interpret the past as surely as he may reveal the future. It was precisely in this way that Jesus Christ dealt with his disciples. He took them back upon the old records. He showed what Moses meant in a way which Moses probably never knew or understood. So it is just possible, for manifold is God's counsel and his paths are in the great deep, that he may have put it into the hearts of his people to speak of the Bible as the word of God.

There are some rights which do not require to be formally "claimed." They wait for recognition. They are self-revealing; they establish themselves little by little; they grow, so to say, like reason and conscience and sense of responsibility. I am speaking of the mere matter of "claim," and inquiring what it amounts to as an argument. I suggest that it may amount to nothing. Shakespeare may or may not claim to be a poet. The mere matter of claim is frivolous. Sometimes the claim may have to be set up by the observer. We come upon some conceptions unexpectedly and suddenly, as when the startled dreamer said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." There was no finger-post at Haran pointing out the road to a sanctuary and setting up a claim, yet Jacob found "a certain place," concerning which he exclaimed, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Between the evening star and the morning star there was a pregnant dream. A cloud rich with visions enswathed the sleeper's head, and a still small voice, unknown to the vulgarity of

sound, thrilled the dreamer's soul like a whisper from eternity, and the environment was changed in all its significance. Who can say that inspiration coming down from heaven to-day may not have shown holy men by what name to name writings seemingly scattered, chaotic, and unrelated? A man may not claim to be great, yet he may be the greater on that account. Some men are not known until they die. Their claim is set up by posterity. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." The crown comes after Calvary. A place may lay no claim to consecration, yet it may affect us like a sanctuary of the Presence, a Zion inhabited of God. The Bible cannot live upon testimonials or "claims" or official sanctions; it can only live by such a supremacy of influence as entitles it to the faith, the love, and the veneration of the world. If it has exercised that influence—account for it variously as we may—that influence is the Bible's best claim. It is not a formal claim; it is a claim that had to be discovered. The pearl had to be dug for, but it was there before the spade cut the concealing sod. So the true meaning of God may have to be discovered in the Bible. One man discovered gravitation, and named it; another may discover inspiration, and connect it with the holiest name. My own inquiry as a Bible reader is not, "What did the prophet mean?" but, "What did the Holy Ghost mean when he spake through the prophet?" The prophet is dead; the Spirit lives, and he must be his own interpreter.

Carefully observe that at this moment I am speaking only of "claim," of which so much is made. There may be no formal claim, no scholastic claim, no legal claim, yet, seeing that inspiration may be retrospective as well as prospective, it is surely open to us to inquire whether

the inspiration, about whose present-day action some men have not the shadow of a doubt, may not have guided other minds to a correct appreciation of the Bible. It is said that Jesus Christ is the Word of God ; but those who say so must not flinch from the application of their own test. Let us therefore reverently ask, “ When did Jesus Christ himself ever claim to be the Word of God ? ” I do not ask what other men claimed for him. Nor do I ask what other men saw him to be in vision or in ecstasy. I confine my attention to the fourfold life of Christ given in the New Testament, and I ask not what John said about Christ, but what Christ said about himself. Where did he specifically and unequivocally claim to be the Word of God ? As to the fourth gospel, some highly trained men have thrown doubts upon its authorship, and John Stuart Mill—certainly not “ a man of one book ”—quotes the fourth gospel as an illustration of what he means by foisting upon Christ words that Christ never uttered. Hear Mill’s testimony :—

“ What *could* be added and interpolated by a disciple we may see in the mystical parts of the Gospel of John, matter imported from Philo and the Alexandrian Platonists and put into the mouth of the Saviour in long speeches about himself such as the other gospels contain not the slightest vestige of, though pretended to have been delivered on occasions of the deepest interest, and when his principal followers were all present.”<sup>1</sup>

That Jesus Christ was the Word of God, some persons who deny his deity might have no difficulty in admitting. Perhaps that is the very title by which they would be most ready to distinguish him. To myself Jesus Christ is not only the Word of God, he is God the Word. But

<sup>1</sup> “ Theism,” p. 254.

where did he *claim* to be this in a way so direct as to preclude the possibility of any other view being taken of his personality? Was it where he grew in wisdom? where he was weary with his journey? where he knew not the hour of the Lord's coming? where he said there is none good but God? where he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Many persons, who cannot justly be accused of thoughtlessness, have regarded such passages as indisputable proof that Jesus Christ was simply the Word of God—the message of God to the human race, God translated into the supremest expressions of excellence. I am disposed to think that the very process by which the Bible is turned from *being* the word of God into *containing* the word of God might for the selfsame reason and without the loss of one degree of cogency be employed in an attack upon the deity of Jesus Christ. The parallels seem to me at this moment to be exact. Able men have asserted that Christ never made any claim for himself that is not consistent with his simply being perfect in all virtue, the sublimest expression of divine excellence. Influential sects have built themselves upon this very doctrine. Large sums of money have been, and still are, subscribed to maintain it. The plea is in many points identical with the reasons given for not describing the Bible as the word of God. It is contended that if we hand the Bible to men as the word of God they will instantly point to passages which describe God as cruel and jealous and vindictive in disproof of our doctrine. But that is exactly what other men do when we declare Jesus Christ to be God the Son! At once they point us to his weakness, his weariness, his confessed ignorance, his necessities, his prayers, his declaration that his Father was greater than he, and they demand how we can reconcile such facts and statements with our belief in

his deity. In that deity we do believe, and we do not deny the perfect humanity of our Lord. I do not ask what "claim" Jesus Christ made for himself. Theudas (Acts v. 36) "boasted himself to be somebody," yet "all as many as obeyed him were scattered and brought to nought." Simon (Acts viii. 9) "gave out that himself was some great one," yet his name has become the signal of the deepest infamy. I do not set store upon mere "claim." History has given us too much reason to suspect it. I study Christ himself, his words, his ways, his thoughts, his deeds, and thus I am led to exclaim, "My Lord and my God."

The way in which the case has been stated by friends on what I may call the other side indicates the point of what may prove to be their error. Condensed, it is this : "Tell men that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and they will instantly find such and such objection." So they may ; but that is precisely what we refrain from doing. Speaking for myself, lest I should load others with responsibility, I never begin by giving the Bible a reputation. I simply say, "Read it ; read it all ; read it with as little interruption as possible ; then tell me what you think of it." I thus leave the Bible to do its own work. You could ruin any preacher, poet, musician, or artist by giving a romantic description of him before he had an opportunity of showing his own quality in his own way. Much better say, "Hear him, study him, get the key of his method, and then form your own opinion about him." That is all I ask for the Bible or for the Redeeming Lord himself, and I thankfully add that I never knew that method fail.

As for defining what is meant by "the word of God" we must remember that there is no final definition. No

man can define God, or truth, or life, or love. They are original and indefinable terms. We know many things without being able to define them. Consciousness is larger than formal intelligence. It is possible to intellectualise religious thought, and to reduce it to a species of literature—that is, to something that can be appraised and determined by grammar and lexicon and criticism. No wise man will despise any part of this literary apparatus ; at the same time the apparatus must be kept within its own lines. The cry for definition may easily become both pedantic and frivolous. In all languages there are expressions which are symbolic rather than literal ; idioms which represent our ideal condition or aspiration rather than words which can be separated from one another and parsed independently. In the higher grammar quite a cluster of words may be but a single nominative. The phrase “the-capital-of-England” may be but one hyphenated word, and may be treated not as an article, a noun, and a preposition, but as a consolidated substantive. When we speak of the Bible as “the word of God” we may be using a symbolic idiom,—an idiom which represents the supreme purpose of the book—its vital content and soul—in a sense and measure which no merely literary definition can fully express. It is thus that the Bible may be, in my judgment, and is, in my practice, more fitly, more sensitively, more truthfully described by the thrilling phrase “the word of God” than by any alternative designation. We require a descriptive which is exquisitely nice, at once profound and delicate, to represent the whole meaning of the Bible. To describe the Bible as “the word of God” is, in my view, to describe the book by its supreme purpose, which purpose is the revelation of God in such degree and proportion as the human mind is able to receive it. If I must characterise the Bible either by its

human workmanship or its divine purpose—assuming it to have a divine purpose—I deliberately elect to regard it as “the word of God.” In making this election I choose the less of two difficulties. I cannot escape mystery in receiving the Bible, but I escape the greater mystery by receiving it as a message from God. I know that the penmanship is human—I know that whatever is human is imperfect—yet that does not affect the divine purpose except in the sense that the limited instrument necessarily modifies the illimitable music. The impassioned pianist crushes the keys and strings of his instrument because it can only tell half his thought. Embodiment always means contraction. Incarnation means locality. The kingdom of heaven is larger than its parables, though they be shaped and coloured by the King himself. It must be remembered that we are dealing with no less a theme than the revelation of God. How to bring it into words! Eternity is incommoded when endeavouring to typify itself upon the dial-space of time. It is the culmination of irony. The Bible is the revelation of God—ineffable—in the only setting or framework possible in the present conditions of life. To bring God into language is to bring him within limitations. Words are constantly trying to define themselves, and even to do what they were never meant to do. Words may be better used when simply pointing to what is infinitely greater than themselves than when trying to say everything inclusively and finally. There are points in religious thinking at which reverent and adoring silence must supersede impotent definition. Even human history, even autobiography itself, must suffer from embodiment in any one set of terms. The verbal accommodation is too small. The only way in which national or personal history can be written, under present conditions, is the way of one-sidedness, partiality, incompleteness, and badly

lighted colour. Beyond all the most elaborate and balanced expression stands in silence the motive, the thought, the impulse, the quenchless immortality for which there are no words,—the gold of thought which cannot be expressed in the bronze of speech. So, when I am challenged to define the phrase “the word of God,” I am not ashamed to own that to my mind the phrase typifies a reality which it is impossible fully to express in terms which would not themselves require to be defined.

Speaking thus of the claim of the Bible to be “the word of God,” and of the limits of verbal and spiritual “definition,” we are reminded of a method of treating the Bible which is known as “dissection.” My present feeling is that the method of dissection is impossible. But is not the Bible a piece of literature? Only in a very limited sense, and of course within that limited sense it is open to partial dissection. But from my point of view the Bible is infinitely more than a piece of literature, and just as it becomes more it passes out of the region of dissection. We can dissect literature, but can we dissect revelation? We can dissect the body, but can we dissect the life? We can dissect the rose, but can we dissect its fragrance? What is called the dissection of the Bible is not undertaken irreverently. On the contrary, it is claimed that the botanist dissects the flower because he loves it. I think, however, that the analogy is imperfect. There is a botanist’s flower and there is a poet’s flower. A mother may view her infant’s body in one way and an anatomist may view it in another. But is not the infant an anatomical structure? Yes, and infinitely more, and in that glorious “more” the technical anatomist has no rights. So with the Bible. It is literature and it is revelation. It is history and it is insight. It is discipline and it is holiness. The

altar can be measured in cubits, but the sacrifice which is offered on it is a magnitude upon which no measuring rod can be laid. Unless, therefore, the term "dissection" be very carefully guarded and limited, its importance as a method may easily become exaggerated.

A special danger arises in the form of a temptation to judge the part out of its relation to the whole. I have been enabled to regard the Bible as a unit. I know it is a collection of what may be called tracts or pamphlets, and that probably no one writer knew, or in many instances could possibly know, what the others had written. Yet to my view the Bible is a unit. One part belongs to another. One part explains another. This is indeed very marvellous considering the different authorships, the different dates, the different environments. It is not difficult to believe that the authors must have been moved by a common impulse, and must have been building a common temple without knowing it. The parts of the temple come together most wonderfully, as if proportioned and fitted by the same architect. So wondrous is the effect upon my own mind that if any teacher should explain the marvel by saying, "Holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," I could accept the solution; my reason, my imagination, and my heart could unite in exclaiming, "Lo! God is here, and I knew it not; this is none other than the word of God, and this is the light of heaven!" Nor am I to be troubled by having my attention called to the real or supposed defects of certain portions of the Bible. "Can the Book of Ecclesiastes," say some, "be looked upon as the word of God,—look at its materialism, its sensuousness, its pessimism?" The Book of Ecclesiastes is part of a larger book. Its pessimism is a shadow upon a landscape. There is undoubtedly

a pessimistic side of life, and I am glad to have it expressed exactly as it is found in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Bible would have been incomplete without it. If it were the whole Bible, it would cover the soul with deep darkness; but as part of the Bible it is true to human experience, and the very recognition of it is itself an encouragement to faith and hope. Others say, "Can the Book of Esther be part of the word of God when the name of God is not so much as mentioned in it?" For my own part I can see little but God in the main action of that tragedy. God does sometimes govern anonymously. To me it is not an unacceptable conception that sometimes the light is reflex rather than direct, and that in reading some histories the influence is more obvious than the personality. The one thought to be borne in mind in this connection is that the Bible having been made into a unit is to be judged in its unity even in the very act of considering its parts. Books which may be difficulties when torn out of their setting may assume new colour and meaning when regarded in their relation to an organic whole. So also with texts, separate verses, and special commandments which are supposed to present such stumbling-blocks to that sensitive creature, that highly wrought and delicately constructed machine, the infidel. Some teachers are painfully careful of his feelings. He is most sensitive. When he hears that God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, he faints. When he is told that the Canaanites and other persons in whose feelings and sufferings he is deeply interested were driven out of the land with great slaughter and loss, he is overpowered. When he comes to passages which seem to direct that the heads of little ones are to be dashed against the stones, he simply lays down the Bible in horror and becomes

a larger infidel than ever. Yet, after all, and speaking with trembling deference, even an infidel may occasionally be wrong. Yet in what white-faced awe we stand before him! How anxious the commentators are to explain verse 36 to him in a way that will soothe his exasperated feelings! How deeply anxious the preachers are so to explain the Almighty that the dear and sensitive infidel may take a more lenient and hopeful view of the general way in which the universe is managed as a whole. For my part I will not make an idol of an infidel. Again and again I would say, notwithstanding the apparently impious audacity of the assertion, that even an infidel may sometimes be wrong. I can at least imagine it possible that in the final audit the Bible writers may have seen farther than some who are shocked by their statements. Evils do run out their consequences to the third and the fourth generation. Nations are as a matter of fact displaced and replaced in a mysterious way. Even little children are dashed against the stones. If these facts be degraded into mere anecdotes, they are made horrible by first being made contemptible; but set in their right atmosphere, thrown into their true perspective amid the ever coming and ever vanishing centuries, read in the larger light—even in God's high noon—who knows but that it may yet be proved that it was the infidel who was wrong? The dear and sensitive infidel cannot receive the Bible because of verse 79, then why should I receive the world when I am first invited to believe that there is a devil? I am shocked by the suggestion. Every nerve quivers with agony at the very thought. Yet my infidelity does not destroy the devil. I can sooner destroy him by my faith than by my unbelief. My faith enables me to realise that the devil and all his angels are the chained slaves of the eternal throne.



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